JUNE
8th
1926
25c

PUBLISHED
TWICE A MONTH

Adventure

Talbot Mundy
Leonard H. Nason
Norman Springer
Leslie McFarlane
Fiswoode Tarleton
Arthur D. Howden Smith
Albert Richard Wetjen
Post Sargent
Leo Walmsley

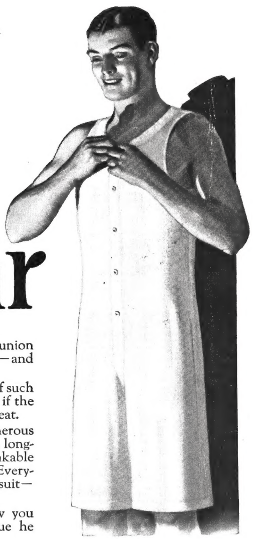
2 Complete Novelettes

JUNE 8th ISSUE, 1926
VOL. LVIII No. 5

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

One Dollar



DOLLAR Topkis is a dollar union suit only because it is made—and bought—by the millions.

You would pay more for fabrics of such quality and for such workmanship, if the demand for Topkis were not so great.

But now you get the healthful generous comfort-fit of Topkis. You get fine, longwear fabrics. Pearl buttons. Unbreakable buttonholes. Careful tailoring. Everything you can think of in a union suit—in Topkis, for One Dollar!

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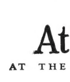

The Flatlock Seam. Nine needles weave the materials together into a seam that is the strongest part of the garment.

Men's Union Suits, $1.00, in fancy or plain fabrics. Men's Shirts and Drawers, Boys' Union Suits and Children's Waist Union Suits, 75c each. In Canada, Men's Union Suits, $1.50.

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Look for this label
—at your dealer's

TOPKIS

Athletic Underwear

AT THE TOP OF UNDERWEAR FAME STANDS THE TOPKIS NAME

To the man who is 35
and DISSATISFIED

WE DELIBERATELY pass over a large proportion of the readers of Adventure in order to address this page directly to *men in their thirties*.

There is a powerful reason for this. The dissatisfied man of twenty-five is not usually in a difficult position. He has few responsibilities; he can move easily; he can take a chance.

But from thirty-five to forty is the age of crisis. In these years a man either marks out the course which leads to definite advancement or settles into permanent unhappiness. There are thousands who see the years passing with a feeling close to desperation.

They say

"I must make more money," but they have no plan for making more.

"There is no future for me," but they see no other opening.

"I am managing to scrape along now, but how in the world will I ever educate my children?"

To men whose minds are constantly—and often almost hopelessly—at work on such thoughts, this page is addressed. It is devoid of rhetoric. It is plain, blunt common sense.

Let us get one thing straight at the very start—

We do not want you unless you want us

There is the dissatisfied man who will *do* something, and the one who won't. We feel sorry for the latter, but we cannot afford to enrol him. We have a reputation for training men who—as a result of our training—earn large salaries and hold responsible positions. That reputation must be maintained. We can do much, but we cannot *make* a man succeed who will not help himself. So rest assured you will not be unduly *urged* into anything.

Now what can happen to

A dissatisfied man who acts?

We wish we could answer that question by letting you read the letters that come to us in every mail. Here is one, for example—from Victor F. Stine of Hagerstown, Md. "I was floundering around without a definite goal," he says, "and was seriously considering a Civil Service appointment." (You can tell from that how hopeless he was. A Civil Service appointment means a few thousand dollars a year *for life*.)

"The study of the Course and Service was not a hardship," he continues, "rather it was a real pleasure because it is so practical and inspiring thruout." (The *method* of the Course makes it practical and inspiring. We teach business not alone thru study but thru *practice*. You learn executive thinking by meeting executive problems and making executive decisions.) "Added self-confidence and increased vision gained from the Course," says Mr. Stine, "enabled me to accept and discharge added responsibilities successfully."

He is Secretary now of the organization in which he was then a dissatisfied cog.

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For a man like Mr. Stine we can achieve really great results. By learning, thru the Modern Business Course and Service, the necessary fundamental facts of *all departments* of business, he insures his success. His judgment, his value, increase. The closed roads open. The worries disappear.

We attach a coupon to this advertisement. It is a little thing, but our experience proves that it separates out of every hundred readers the few who can act. If you are one of these let us mail you that wonderful little book, "Forging Ahead in Business." For thousands it has turned dissatisfaction into immediate progress.

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ADVENTURE
June 8th, 1926

Published twice a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 58
Number 5

People You Admire . . .

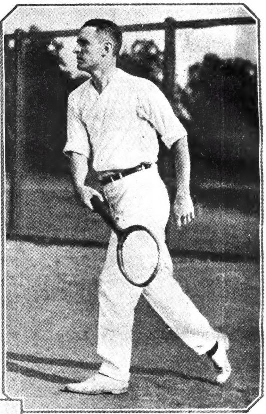
Buoyant, vital, they banished their ills—found fresh joy—through one food

NOT a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense—Fleischmann's Yeast is simply a remarkable fresh food.

The millions of tiny active yeast plants in every cake invigorate the whole system. They aid digestion—clear the skin—banish the poisons of constipation. Where cathartics give only temporary relief, yeast strengthens the intestinal muscles and makes them healthy and active. And day by day it releases new stores of energy.

Eat two or three cakes regularly every day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices, water or milk—or just plain, nibbled from the cake. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before breakfast and at bedtime.* Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

Let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-29, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.



" 'YOU LOOK SO MUCH BETTER than we, who have had vacations, do' remarked several of my teachers today. 'Is it the arduous work of summer school or prosperity that agrees with you?' The truth is that Fleischmann's Yeast has cured the constipation that sapped my strength for so long. Today I feel like a new man."
CHARLES F. WILLIS, Baltimore, Md.

"RUN-DOWN, IRRITABLE AND DEPRESSED, my nerves were in a dreadful condition. My physician recommended Fleischmann's Yeast. I took three cakes a day for two months. I noticed a remarkable change. My energy returned, my complexion regained its freshness. And I still take my Fleischmann's Yeast to keep fit."
VIRGINIA B. MAURICE, New York City.

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THIS FAMOUS FOOD tones up the entire system—aids digestion—clears the skin—banishes constipation.

Adventure
Registered in U. S. Patent Office
June 8, 1926
Vol. LVIII No. 5

Published Twice a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy-four geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Herpetology, Railroading and Entomology.

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Headings . . . . **V. E. Pyles**

Cover Design . . . . **A. L. Ripley**

One Complete Novel and Two Complete Novelettes

"TELL me that Solomon Islanders have no sense of humor, and I will speak to you of *Ugu*, who fed us wild swine at the Long Pig feast; or of the devil-devil doctor in the stove-pipe hat, who scared a cabin-boy off deck by the simple sentence: 'He fella likum fella fat.' " Sitting in a bark canoe that dark night, I knew that I had rather dance about the heathen cook-pots than catapult the honest blackbirder's stink-pot half an inch. "PRIVATEERS, PEARLS, AND TEARS" is a complete novel of early trading days in the South Sea by Captain Raabe.

IKE SKULLERN just had to bury that little fawn antelope; but the gun-and-ammunition-store man said it belonged to the drummer. So *Ike* slipped his short-barreled rifle into the saddle-holster, and rode with the rising moon across the Rio Grande. "THE LUCK OF A CALF," a complete novelette by William P. Barron, will appear in the next issue.

BABAR, the Tiger, was grandson of Tamerlane and a descendant of Ghenghis Khan. At eleven he found himself a deposed king with a handful of followers. Before he reached full manhood he had defended the walls of Samarkand and was on the way to empire. His sword-hand also wielded the pen. "THE BOOK OF THE TIGER—THE WARRIOR"—by Babar, Emperor of India, and transcribed by Harold Lamb, will appear in the next issue.

Adventure ahead!

— beyond Southern horizons

Land ho!!! Adventure—and mystery to port and to starboard! Crescent beaches—moonlit lagoons—the splash of surf-boards—a far-off guitar! Tropic islands—native huts perched on stilts—dense jungles—hanging vines! Strange animals! Chattering cockatoos, parrots and other birds, gorgeously plumaged!

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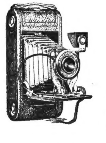

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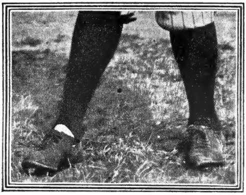

BABE RUTH'S *Home Run Feet*

"It isn't always the length of the hit that scores the run. Sometimes it's the speed in getting around the bases. So I have to keep my feet in prime shape."

So writes Babe Ruth—the famous "Bambino" of the New York Yankees.

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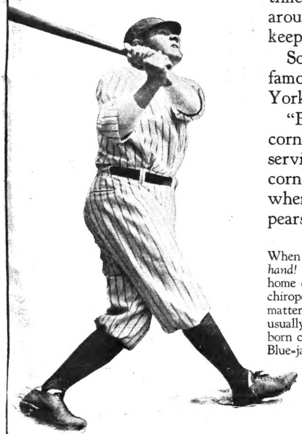

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THE SAFE AND GENTLE WAY TO END A CORN

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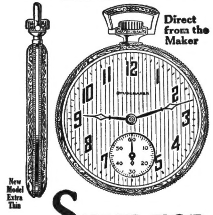

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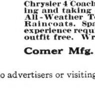

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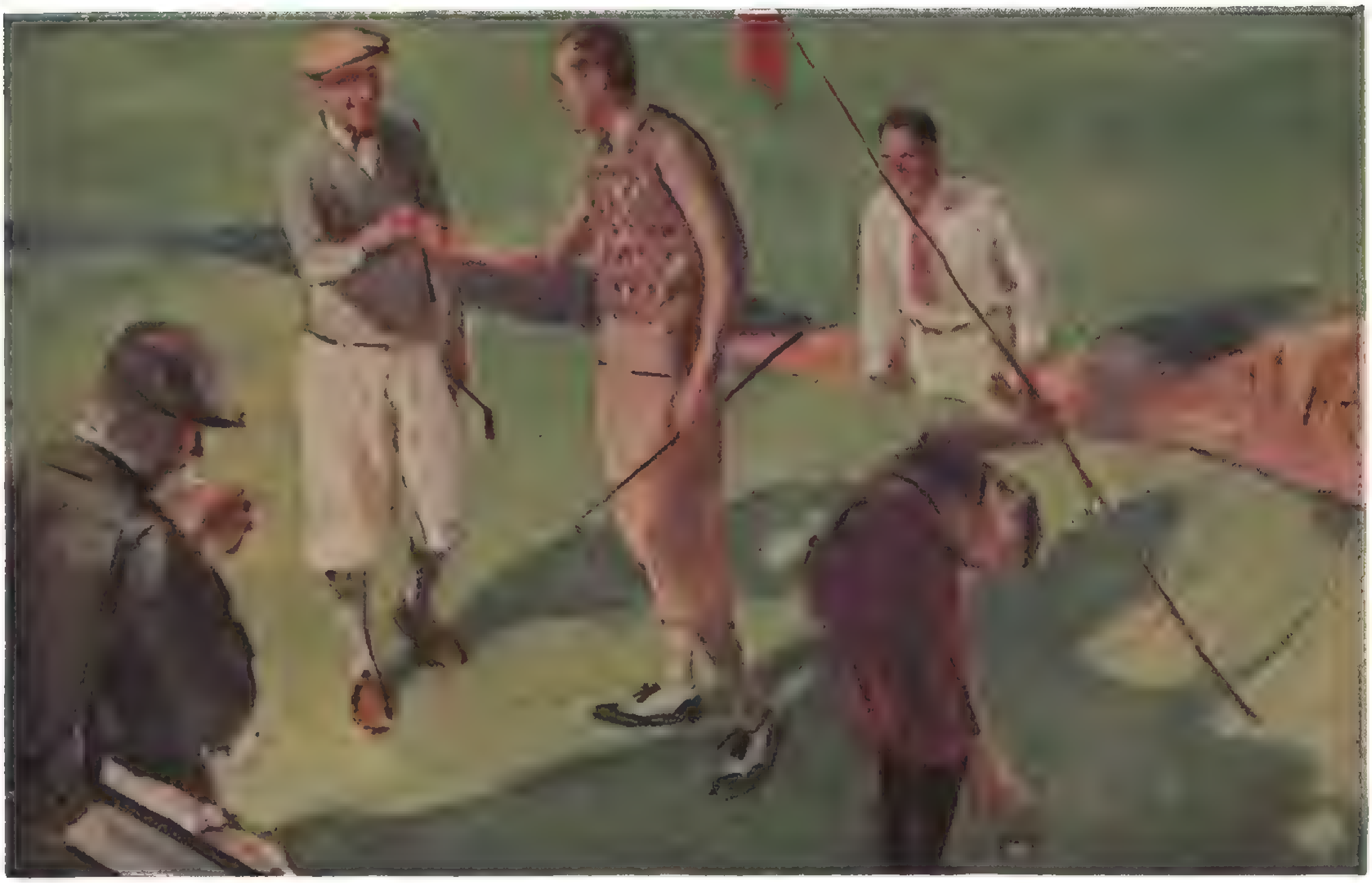
—have a Camel!



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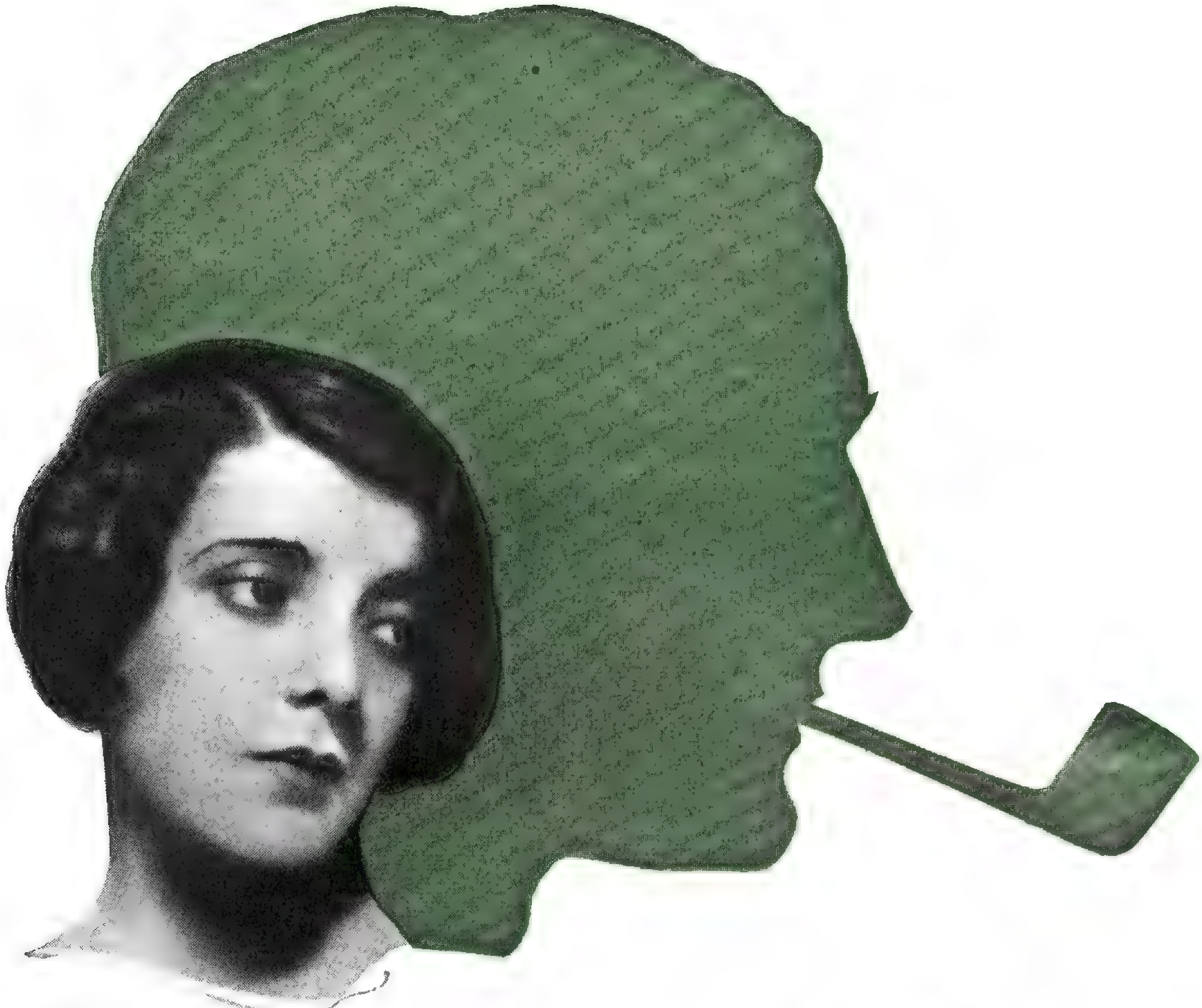

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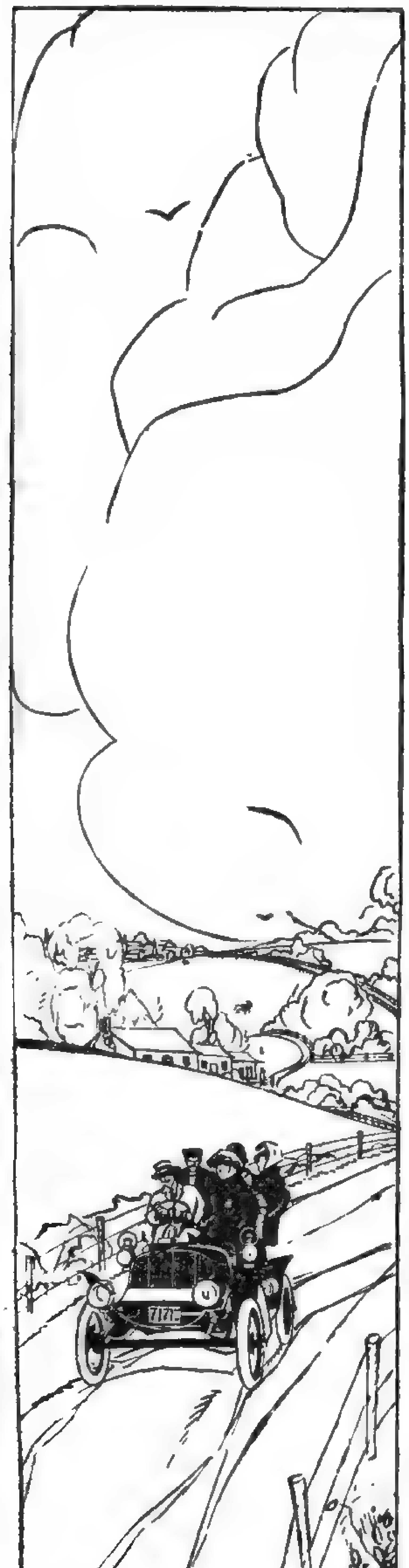

With the family perched high on the rear seat—with father and perhaps yourself cutting the wind in front, the motor-car in 1905 stuttered and staggered its way across an incredulous countryside. The Sunday drive in those days was the high spot of the week's entertainment—the thrill of that distant decade.

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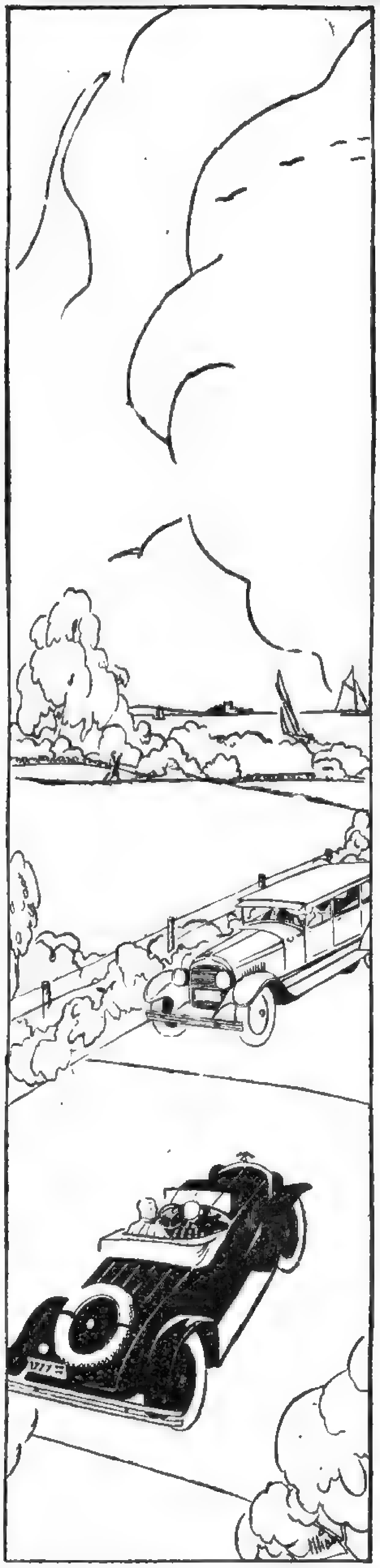

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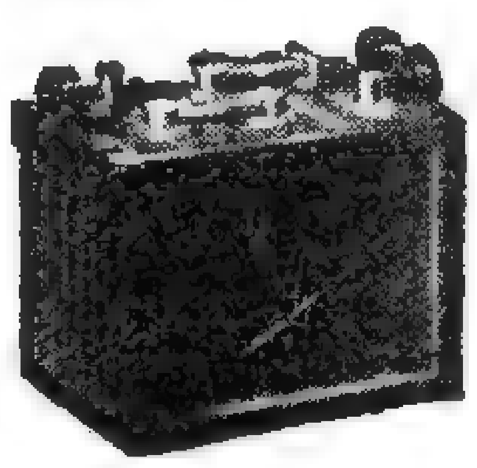

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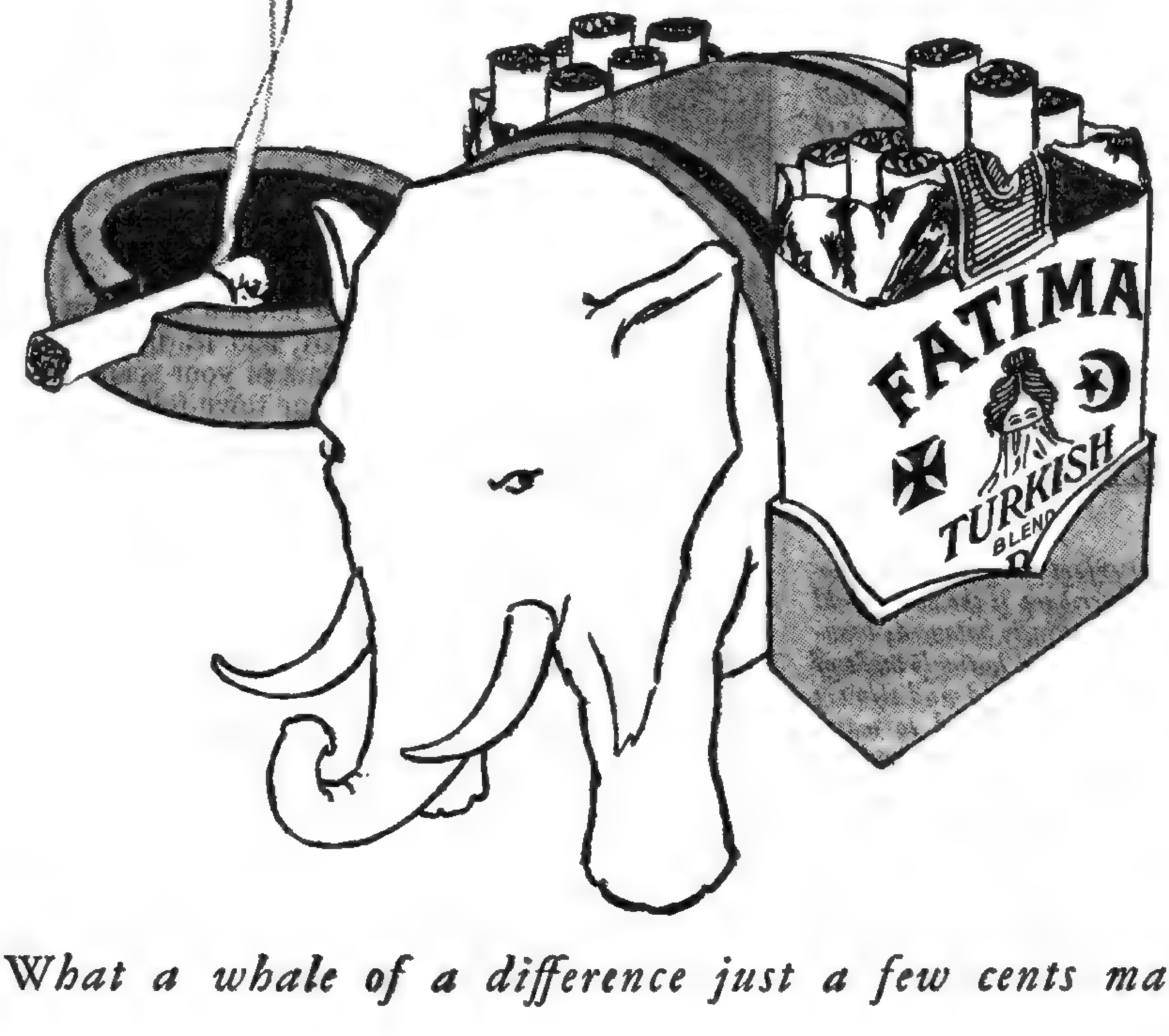
BECAUSE it costs us more to make Fatima the retail price is likewise higher. But would men continue to pay more, do you think, except for genuinely increased enjoyment? The fact cannot be denied—they *do* continue



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Only 4 Motions used in playing this fascinating instrument. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

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After you get the four easy motions you play harmonious chords with very little practice. No previous musical knowledge necessary.

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Even if you don't know one note from another, the 52 printed lessons and the clear pictures make it easy to learn quickly. Pay as you play.

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You'll never be lonesome with this beautiful Hawaiian Guitar. Write for Special Offer and easy terms. A postcard will do. ACT!

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Approved as a Correspondence School Under the Laws of the State of New York

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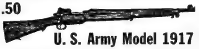

U. S. Army Model 1917 Rifle

Cal. 30, five shot. Barrel 25 1-4 in., total length 46 in., weight 9 1-2 lbs. Barrel new. Sight mounted over receiver. This type used by A. E. F. **Price, $12.50.** Ball cartridges $3.50 per 100. Gunners cleaning kit 85 cents. **Tents,** cots, **Messpans**, canteens, **Knapsacks,** haversacks, **Outing Suits,** hats, helmets, **Saddles,** Bridles, **Bugles,** lariats, **Medals,** etc. **15 Acres Army Goods. Catalog 1925, 60th Anniversary** issue, 372 pages, fully illustrated, contains pictures and historical information of all American military guns and pistols (incl. Colts) since 1775, with all World War rifles. Mailed 50c. Est. 1865 **Special New Circular** for 2c stamp.

Francis Bannerman Sons, 501 Broadway, New York City

She doesn't fear the dentist

Wise men and women go to the dentist at least twice a year for a thorough mouth inspection. They don't put off the dental appointment until forced to seek relief from pain and the dentist has to hurt. If you see your dentist in time he can keep your teeth and gums healthy.

Neglect punishes

FOUR out of FIVE

Failure to take simple precautions lets pyorrhea, dread disease of the gums, become entrenched in the mouths of four out of five at forty, and many younger, according to dental statistics.

Start today to brush teeth and gums night and morning with Forhan's if you would be with the lucky who escape pyorrhea's ravages. Forhan's firms the gums and keeps them pink and healthy. It doesn't give this insidious infection chance to steal upon you.

If you have tender bleeding gums go to your dentist immediately for treatment and use Forhan's regularly. The chances are your own dentist will recommend it. It contains Forhan's Pyorrhea Liquid dentists use to combat pyorrhea.

Forhan's is a pleasant tasting dentifrice that gives the teeth perfect cleansing; and forestalls decay.

Include Forhan's in your daily hygiene for your health's sake. Pyorrhea is no respecter of persons.

Four out of five is its grim count. At all druggists', 35c and 60c in tubes.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
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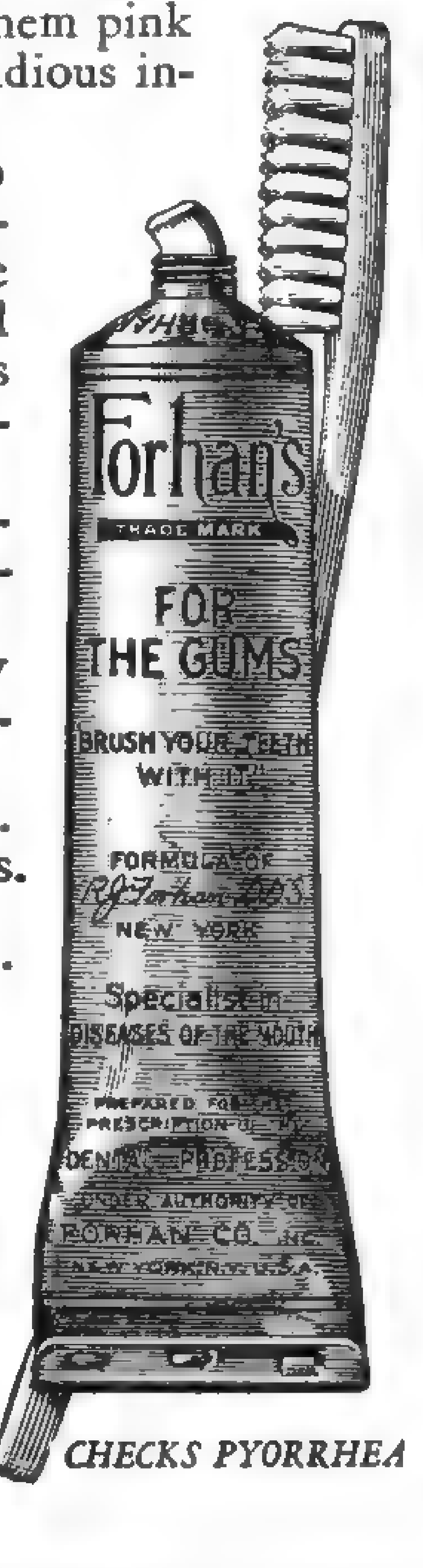
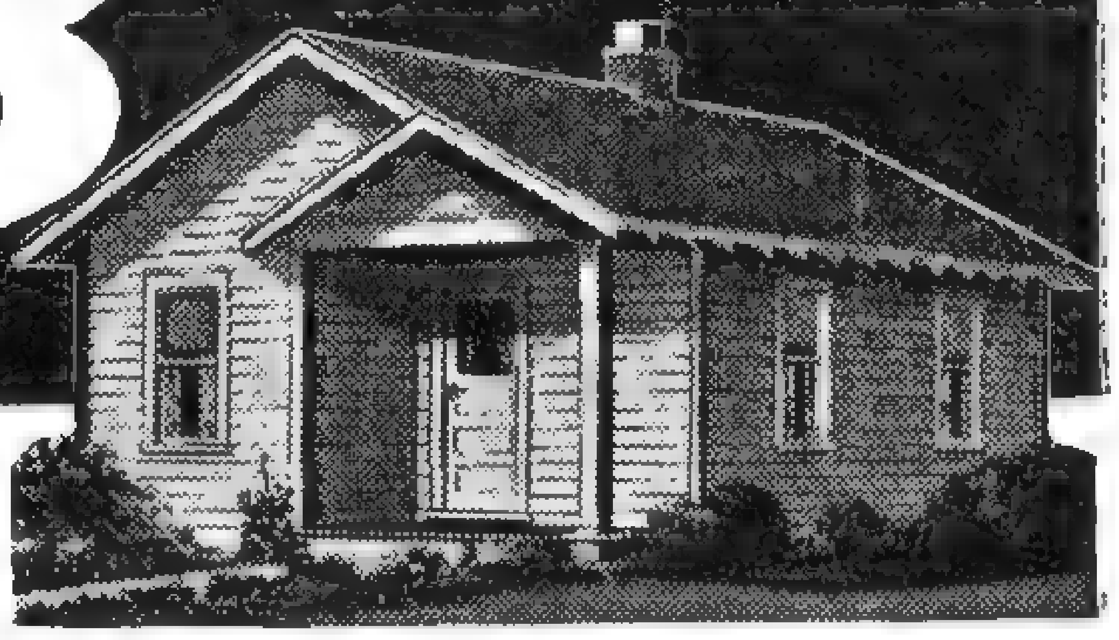


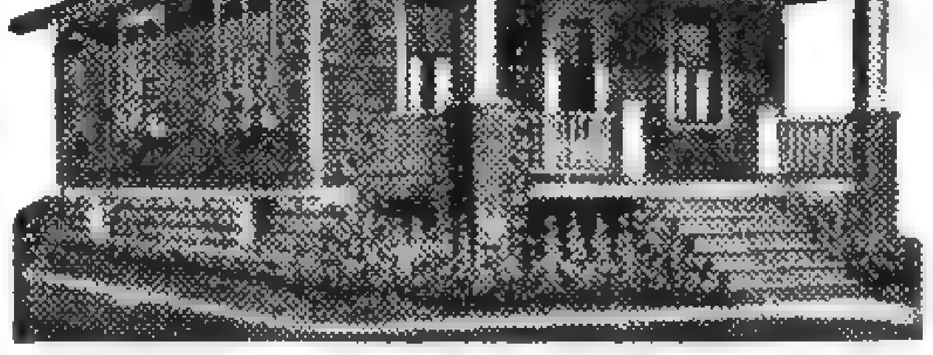
Forhan's
FOR THE GUMS
MORE THAN A TOOTH PASTE ... IT CHECKS PYORRHEA

5-Room ALADDIN $478
NOT PORTABLE
WE PAY THE FREIGHT



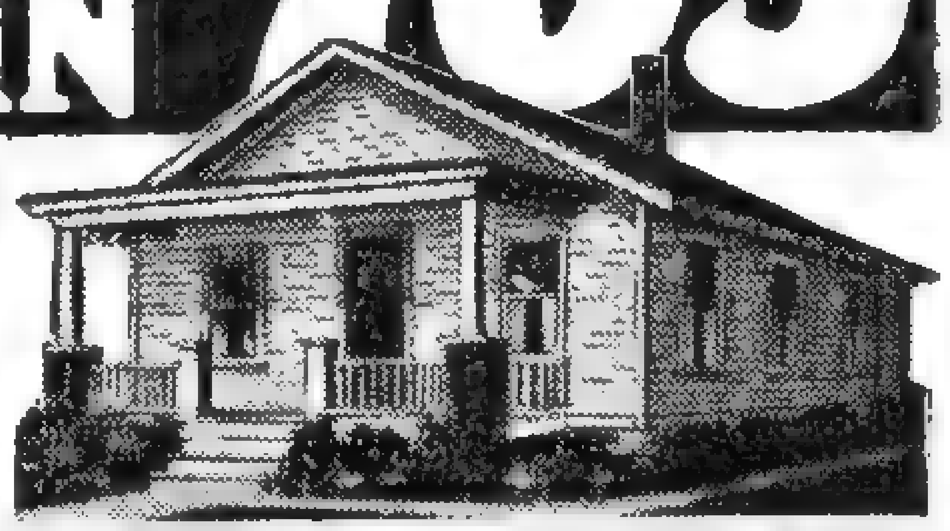
You can buy all the materials for a complete home
direct from the manufacturer and save four profits, on lumber, millwork, hardware, labor.

6-Room ALADDIN $618



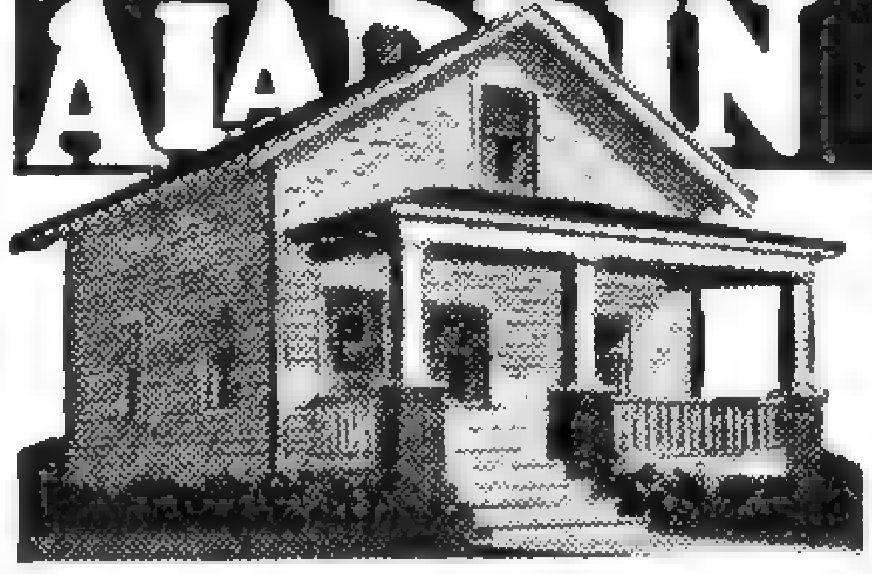
Living room, dining room, 2 bedrooms, kitchen, bath. 3 other plans in catalog. Very high grade lumber throughout.

7-Room ALADDIN $765



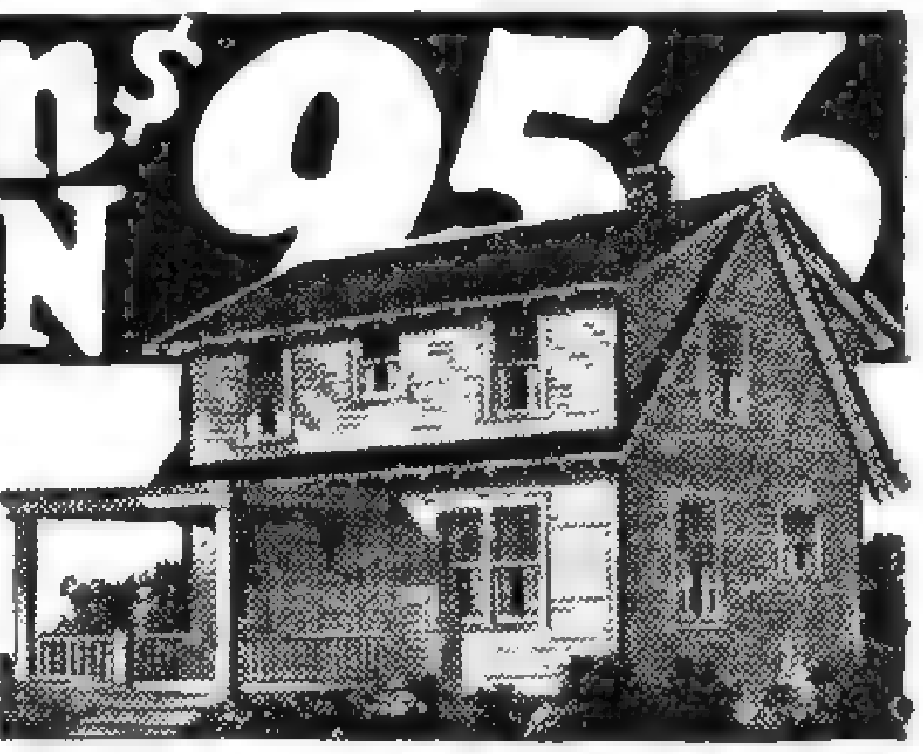
Living room, dining room, kitchen, 3 bedrooms, and bathroom. All materials readicut, saving 18% on cost.

Story and Half ALADDIN $789



Story and a half semi-bungalow, with second floor available for 2 bedrooms. 2 floor plan arrangements. Any handy man can erect these houses.

7-Room ALADDIN $956



Large living room with circle-tread open stairway, dining room, kitchen. 3 bedrooms, each with closet. Bath on second floor.

Price includes all lumber cut to fit; highest grade interior woodwork, siding, flooring, windows, doors, glass, paint, hardware, nails, lath, roofing, with complete instructions and drawings. **Freight paid** to your station. Permanent Homes—NOT PORTABLE. Many styles of year'round dwellings, summer cottages and garages to choose from. **Write nearest mill today for FREE Money-Saving Catalog No. 1721.**

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You'll like this Tobacco

If you could blend tobacco to your own individual taste the result would be Happyland.

HAPPYLAND

is your tobacco—a blend—a touch of the Orient tempered with the sunshine of America's southland. Send twenty-five cents and the name of your tobacconist and let us send you a full two-ounce sample of this mild and fragrant smoke.

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125 Hotel St.
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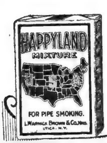
Since 1838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Men—Women—get out of stuffy offices, stores and fume-filled factories.

I did, and I now earn $200 a week as a Real Estate Specialist. If you want to learn the secret of my success and use my amazingly resultful system, mail coupon at once for a free copy of a new book "How to Become a Real Estate Specialist."

It shows you how to get started right at home—in your spare time—without capital or experience; how you can build up a profitable, independent business of your own, and make more money than you ever before thought possible.

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FREE CATALOG fully illustrated and with complete information about typewriters sent on request —no obligation whatever. **WRITE TODAY.**

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No schooling required. We teach by practical shop methods with tools on equipment. No text-books. Thousands of trained auto mechanics wanted. I pay your railroad fare myself.

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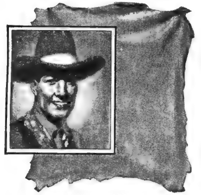
BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every Owner Buys Gold Initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples.

AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 85, East Orange, N. J.



Leather face

or baby face

Spreading the gospel of the Mennen Shave naturally makes me notice faces a whole lot.

I've been handed the keys of the city by men with faces as tender-skinned as a baby's and others with faces that looked like a Sunday roast-of-beef on Wednesday.

And they all swear by Mennen Shaving Cream. Here's a lather that can reduce the horniest whiskers to absolute and complete limpness. The great Mennen discovery—Dermutation.

If you're one of those 3-brush-dabs and 7-second-razor artists, it gives you a *shave*—a close shave—better than you've ever had before. A shave that stays all day.

And if you've got a tender, shave-every-other-day skin, your razor goes through literally without any pull or scrapy feeling. A clean, smooth de-bearding *every* day.

Next, a little squeeze of Mennen Skin Balm rubbed over the shaved area. Tingling, cooling, refreshing. Tones up the tissue—soothes any possible irritation. Greaseless—absorbed in half a minute—and as sensible as putting on a clean collar to go and see your best girl. Comes in tubes.

Same way with Mennen-Talcum-for-Men. Made so it won't show on your face. Dries the skin thoroughly. Antiseptic. Leaves a gorgeous silk-like film that protects against wind, rain, sun or a scraggly collar.

Step into your corner drugstore today and get the makings. It's a good habit to get habituated to.

Jim Henry
(Mennen Salesman)

MENNEN
SHAVING CREAM

"He Used to Belong to Our Crowd"

"He's the only one of the old gang who made good"

"THAT'S Bob Thompson, sales manager for Fink & Snyder. They say he makes $15,000 a year.

"Yet it hasn't been long since he wasn't making more than $35 a week. I know, because he used to belong to our crowd. There were six of us and there was hardly a night that we didn't bowl or shoot pool or play cards together.

"Lots of times we would sit down and talk about earning more money, but that's all it ever amounted to—*talk!* Bob was the only one who really did anything.

" 'I'm through wasting my spare time like this,' he said one night. 'I'm going to take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools and try to make something of myself before it is too late.'

"We didn't see much of Bob after that—he'd always laugh and say he was 'too busy' when we'd ask him to join a party.

"Look at him now. A big man in a big job. Making five times as much as I'll ever make. Oh, what a fool I was not to send in that I. C. S. coupon when he did!"

How much longer are **you** going to wait before taking the step that you know will bring you advancement and more money? Aren't you tired working for a small salary?

It takes only a moment to mark and mail this salary-raising coupon and find out what the International Correspondence Schools can do for you. Surely it is better to send it in today than to wait a year or two years and then realize how much the delay has cost you. "Do it now!"

Mail the Coupon for Free Booklet

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2031-E, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

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☐ Industrial Management
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☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
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☐ Private Secretary
☐ Spanish ☐ French
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Better Letters
☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Business English
☐ Civil Service
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Common School Subjects
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☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering
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☐ Mechanical Engineer
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☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Railroad Positions
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ Civil Engineer
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Metallurgy
☐ Steam Engineering
☐ Radio
☐ Architect
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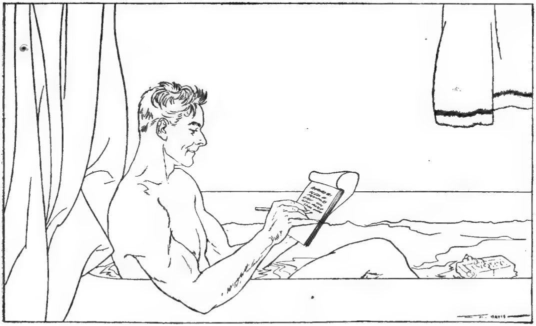
Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.



Spring final examination

COURSE: *Bathing* II (*Morning & Evening*)

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTE: *This examination is conducted under the honor system and answers may be written in the bathroom.*

1 If you waste 5 to 10 minutes in the morning chasing an elusive cake of sinker-soap along the tub-bottom, what happens to a soft-boiled egg for breakfast?

2 One man sings while he bathes; another sputters in wrath. What soap does each use, and why?

3 Of the 55 good reasons for using Ivory Soap in the bath, which comes next in importance after "*It floats*"?

4 Bathers for nearly fifty years have compared Ivory lather to (*a*) clouds, (*b*) foam, (*c*) whipped cream. Can you think of a better comparison? (A correct answer to this question insures a passing mark in the examination.)

5 If an airplane travels at the rate of 3 miles per minute, how much faster does Ivory lather rinse off?

PROCTER & GAMBLE

99 44/100 % PURE IVORY SOAP IT FLOATS

If you do not own a
cake of Ivory Soap,
buy one or ask your
wife to lend you her
personal cake of
Guest Ivory

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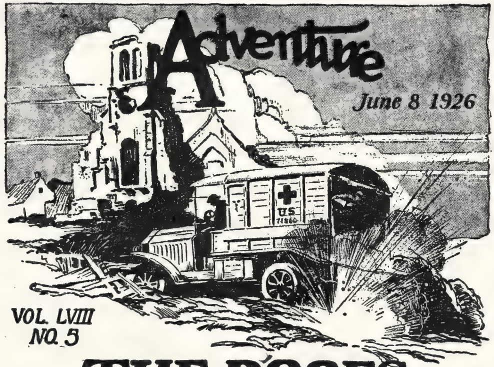

THE ROOFS OF VERDILLOT

A Complete Novelette by LEONARD H. NASON

Author of "A Sergeant of Cavalry," "Burial," etc.

THERE was a faded gold horse's head over the door. A weatherbeaten sign said Boucherie Chevaline, which meant that once upon a time this place had been a butcher shop where one might buy horse flesh, considered by some to be of finer grain and better taste than beef. Now, however, if one looked through the shop window he would see nothing but the sky, an untidy vista of tumbled stone, and houses with shattered roofs. A second look would reveal the fact that on one side of the shop, where there was still a remnant of floor, was what looked like a stove on wheels. Over this stove was a tarpaulin supported on poles, and a row of hooks on the wall on which the butcher's wares used to be hung were now utilized to suspend ladles, spoons, and a forequarter of beef.

A man, naked to the waist, sat on the pole of this stove wagon. Another man sat on a box against the opposite wall and regarded the first. Both men wore hob-nailed shoes, both wore olive drab puttees and breeches and both wore steel helmets. The main difference was that the man that sat against the wall was dirtier than the naked man, and had on an apron that had once been white, the bottom part of which was rolled up about his waist. This place was a field kitchen of the American Expeditionary Forces in France, and the dirty man was the cook. The naked man was a visitor.

The man on the kitchen pole continued

"The Roofs of Verdillot," copyright, 1926, by Leonard H. Nason.

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his labors. He had an undershirt, an O. D. shirt, and a blouse lay beside him. There was a kind of back door to the stove, and the man had this door open heating some pieces of wire. He picked up the blouse and, protecting his hand with a towel or something similar, he took a white hot wire from the stove. This wire he proceeded to draw hissing along the seams of his blouse. The cook observed. The wire cooled and the naked man selected another. Again that faint hissing and a tiny thread of white smoke.

"Think that'll kill 'em, Rouge?" asked the cook finally.

"I don't know," replied the other man, who was called Rouge from the brick-like appearance of his hair. "I read it in a book. They used to do it in the Civil War. Well, I ain't kiddin', I got to do somethin' or they'll be pickin' my bones."

"Yuh oughta be careful where yuh sleep," advised the cook. "I hear they hang out in straw."

"I didn't get 'em that way," said Rouge. "I got 'em off a lot of Jerries we carried one day from Epieds. A coot comes through a crack in the door from the ambulance and takes a chew at me. He goes back an' hollers, 'Fellars, here's white meat. Come runnin'.' I ain't had a minute's peace since."

He bent to his task with renewed fervor.

The cook laid aside the splinter with which he had been excavating the crevices of his teeth, and leaning back, sought tobacco in his shirt pockets.

"Well, it's time I was thinkin' about dinner," he remarked.

There was a shout from somewhere, but faint. In a minute or two the shout was repeated, nearer and clearer. Some one was coming down through the town, along the one street, calling at intervals.

"Rouge!" shouted the voice.

Again the cry, accompanied by a request that some one's black, dirty soul be condemned to eternal flames. The cook stopped smoking to listen.

"Seems to me some one's callin' you, Rouge," said he.

"Rouge!"

This time the shouter was quite near and the two men in the boucherie could plainly hear the other add that Rouge's morals were perverted, that his birth was questionable, his ancestry more so, and that he, the shouter, longed for a chance to tear Rouge's heart from his body and eat it before Rouge's very eyes.

"Gee!" gasped the cook.

"That's Wally, my driver," said Rouge calmly, taking another wire from the fire. "Probably he wants a match."

A head was projected into the shop at this moment and some one cried:

"There you are! By ——, I been screechin' my lungs out all over the town after you."

The other man now entered and stopped in astonishment as he discovered Rouge's clothesless condition.

"Well, I'm ——," he said. "I always had a hunch that you'd go clean off your nut some day. I read in the paper about a man once that tore off all his clothes and run screechin'. He let on to be Abel an' was goin' to police up on Cain. Yuh better get your cleavers outta the way, cook."

"Sit down," said Rouge. "All inventors is crazy. I invented a delouser. I heats this hunk o' wire an' then runs it along the seams of my blouse and shirt an' everything. It kills the coots an' fries their eggs an' wigglers. Man, they wiggle, too, when they get this hot wire shoved up their nose."

"Does it work?" asked Wally, stricken with sudden admiration.

A scheme for eradicating a soldier's live stock was worth investigating.

"I ain't tried it yet," said Rouge. "I just started burnin' 'em out this mornin'."

"Well, snap out of it," said Wally, returning to the matter in hand. "We got to take a gang up an' establish a dressin' station. O' course when I want you you're off gold-brickin'. I give myself sciatica yellin' after you. Come on, now."

"I'm almost through," said Rouge, spitting judiciously on a fresh wire.

"Through ——! Put on your clothes an' come on!"

"Now be yourself," said Rouge. "Try for a minute to pretend you got a little savvy. I got one more seam to do an' then I'll go. There won't no one die for waitin' a couple o' minutes, an' if they do, they'd die anyway."

"No, but we been waitin' an' yellin' an' huntin' for you for a hour!" objected Wally. "The pill rollers is for goin' on foot."

"Let 'em go," said Rouge.

He finished his last seam, took the wires out and laid them gingerly on a stone, telling the cook he would be back for them later in the afternoon. Then he calmly put on his uniform and he and Wally went out to the street.

AT THE upper end of the town was a relay station, where the wounded coming back from the front were sorted out according to the gravity of their hurts. The seriously wounded were laid apart, to be sent out together in an ambulance that must travel very slowly and carefully; the slightly wounded were kept for the field hospital; and those that had died enroute were buried. An ambulance was drawn up in the field beside the road and about this ambulance stood seven men, all wearing the white brassard with a Red Cross. These men received Rouge with expressions of disgust.

"Now you belly-punchers shut up," replied Rouge to their reproaches. "A guy has to have a couple o' minutes to himself out o' the twenty-four hours even if he is in the Army."

Dressing station personnel were known as belly punchers from the fact that they injected anti-tetanus serum in that portion of the human frame.

Rouge began to put his gas mask in the alert position, tied the string behind his back, and as Wally mounted to the seat, Rouge inspected the radiator, looked at the tires, and then opening the box beneath the seat, drew out a five gallon can. He unscrewed the top and applied an eye to the hole.

"Good," said Rouge, "there's three gallons or more o' gas in her."

He put back the can and drew out another one like it. Likewise he unscrewed the top and then gently swung the can in small circles. He stopped and shook the can up and down. He looked at Wally, who avoided his eye. Then Rouge raised the can on high, extending his tongue to catch anything that might run out of the orifice. After a long time a single red drop gathered on the rim of the hole and fell on Rouge's chin. He lowered the can and again looked reproachfully at Wally.

"I didn't know it was so empty," said Wally. "I just took one good pull out of it and, bing! It was all gone."

"I know you," said Rouge, mounting to the seat. "I know what you mean by one good pull. If there was a waterin' trough full o' wine and you an' an elephant was to stick your beaks into it together, the elephant wouldn't get enough to know whether it was wine or water."

A man with the stripes of a sergeant, medical corps, appeared at Rouge's side of the car.

"Do you know where we go, driver?" he inquired.

"Sure," said Wally, "Verdillot."

"Do you know the road?"

"No," said Wally, "don't you?"

"——, no," cried the sergeant. "I thought you knew where it was. It's over toward Seringes somewhere."

"Sure, I know where it is," said Rouge. "It's a little town you can see from the road. It's down in a valley an' it's got red roofs."

"Git in," said Wally, "we'll go to Fere'n Tardenois an' ask the M. P. He'll know. Git in."

"It's a little crowded back there," said the sergeant, "with all the packs and the bandage kits and the tools and the like of that. Why can't I ride here with you? I can sit on the floor and let my feet hang."

"Suit yourself," replied Wally. "Well, let's go. We can't no more than get lost."

"Lean on me, kid," advised Rouge, "I'll get yuh there."

"I been leanin' on you," remarked Wally, as he shifted gears and the ambulance began to move, "an' you're kind of a broken reed. The only thing you can help a guy do is to fall down."

The ambulance climbed a hill and came out on a long stretch of level ground, across which the road ran through wheat fields to the north. The enemy had been beaten on the Marne a week before and was now retreating through this hilly wooded sector. Retreating, but slowly and carefully, holding every ridge, every farm, every little village to the last gasp and exacting a fearful price for every victory of the Americans. The ambulance drivers and the medical personnel had therefore a great deal of work.

The afternoon was pleasant, it was midsummer, and the road was deserted. Who would have thought a war was on? Birds sang in the trees, there was a pleasant smell of fresh green things, of ripe wheat, and the scent of pines. The men in the ambulance felt the effect of all the pleasant landscape and the warm balmy air.

PRESENTLY those on the front seat heard those within lift their voices in song:

"Hand him out a bandage an' a shot o' A. T. S.
Paint him up with iodine an' ask him to confess
That there ain't a better gang in the sunny land o' France,
Than the roarin' rollin' rummies o' the Field Ambulance.
Oh we are the fellers that issues out the jollop.
There ain't a brand o' likker made that packs a meaner wallop."

Rouge prodded Wally with his elbow.

"Hear that?" he asked.

Wally threw out the clutch and slowed the ambulance to a stop.

"Git out, Rouge," said he, "an' see if it's what I think."

Rouge descended and went around to the back of the ambulance.

"What's the matter?" asked the erstwhile singers.

"Nothin's the matter," said Rouge, "only me an' my buddy there would like to join, too."

"Well, go ahead; we ain't stoppin' yuh."

"No," said Rouge, slowly and deliberately, "but we ain't got any tunin' fork."

There was a deep silence within the ambulance. Then a voice whispered:

"Go on give 'em a shot. If we don't they're liable to put the car into a ditch an' make us walk home."

A hand was then thrust from the interior and this hand bore a French canteen, its shoulder-strap dangling. With this canteen Rouge performed the manual of arms prescribed for that weapon and then started toward the front of the ambulance. Midway he paused and was about to present arms again.

"Uh!" said a voice, "none o' that! One shot apiece. We got a long hot ride ahead of us."

Rouge lowered the canteen and looked. The little door behind the driver's seat had been opened and one of the men inside the ambulance had put out his head and was watching Rouge.

"I thought it was plugged up," said Rouge. "It didn't run out very fast. I was just lookin' to see."

There was a chorus of sarcastic laughter from within the ambulance. Rouge advanced to the front seat and offered the canteen to the sergeant.

"No thanks " said the sergeant.

"Huh?" gasped Wally and Rouge.

"Naw, that red stuff is just a tantalizer. There isn't a kick in a barrel of it. I ruined my taste anyway when I was at Fort Thomas. I got too used to drinkin' straight alcohol out o' the medical stores."

"Yeh, I know," said Rouge. "It's tough on a guy sometimes. I was a mess sergeant once an' used to swap canned termatters for coneyac. We didn't like canned termatters in the outfit anyway. Too many guys was in on it. They got to drivin' their ambulances in circles too often and one mornin' I woke up a private. The mistake I made was not givin' the officers a share."

The canteen was returned to the interior of the ambulance and the journey began again. Wally threw back his head and gave tongue:

"As I was comin' through Noisy-le-Sec,what do you think I see?
A great big major general with a girl upon each knee.
Hi, boys, hey, boys, and if you think I lie,
Then you can drive an ambulance an' see the same as I."

Rouge joined in and those within the ambulance roared a muffled chorus. The song, which is after all a real A. E. F. song and not for other ears than those of the members thereof, lasted until they came to the long hill above Fere en Tardenois.

"Listen here a minute," asked the sergeant, clinging to the dashboard as the car swooped roaring down the hill, "what was in that canteen?"

"IT TASTED like sweet spirits o' nitroglycerine," said Rouge.

"Why didn't you tell me?" cried the sergeant, "I thought it was red wine."

"Well," said Rouge, "I ain't no man to force any one to drink if he don't want to. I admire a man that sticks to his principles, especially if there's nine guys an' only one canteen."

The ambulance shot across the narrow valley and growled up the hill into Fere en Tardenois. This was a medium-sized town, the ancient capital of the region, and had been taken by the French a day or so before. There were many old German signs, and new French ones immediately beneath.

Poste de Commandement du Groupement, A. L. C. A. Clichy, and an arrow pointing, Pointe d'eau, and a large white one painted on a wall, Gas Alert Zone.

Of troops there was no further sign. Night is the time when a soldier does his work in modern warfare, and during the day he gets his rest. Then again, the enemy can see in the daytime; he has planes and balloons aloft, and any town, any hamlet, any farmhouse where activity is noticed by day, will be visited that very night by considerable numbers of rude visitors who do not always enter by the door, but come howling in through the roof and go out again in fragments. The men in the ambulance therefore expressed no surprize at the silent aspect of the town.

"Get out, Rouge," said Wally, "and dig some one up."

"There ain't no one here but frogs," replied Rouge, "and all the French I know is to ask for fried eggs and a drink."

"Gwan!" cried Wally, "all you got to do is to say, Verdillot."

"Yeh, but how will I know what the frog says to me back?"

"You see what a job I got, don't you?" pleaded Wally, turning to the sergeant. "I get a lotta help outta this nit-wit, don't I?"

"Aw, button your mouth," said Rouge calmly. "Drive on. I know where Verdillot is."

"When was you ever there?" scoffed Wally.

"I was there day before yesterday when you was gold-brickin' with a cold inthe head. I went up with "Hoop" Thomas. You gotta go through the town an' then turn off to the right."

The sergeant had got down to allow Rouge to dismount and was now standing with his hand thrust idly beneath his gas mask, a look of uncertainty on his face.

"I think we better ask some one," said the sergeant. "You know the front line looks like the teeth of a buzz saw here. We don't want to go running over our lines anywhere."

"You oughta get rid o' them coots," said Rouge. "Why suffer? I got a great scheme—"

"Aw, shut up," interrupted Wally, "this is business. What doctor is goin' to run the dressin'—"

"Have you, though?" cried the sergeant to Rouge. "What is it? I've swum in kerosene, but they seem to like it. I think it gives 'em an appetite. They sure do mangle a man savage afterwards."

"Why, you just heat a wire," said Rouge, "and run it along the seams of your clothes. It fixes 'em good."

"I find they hang out a lot in the knot of a man's dog-tag," continued the sergeant. He would have said more but the passengers began to grow impatient and Wally had rested his head on the wheel as if preparing for sleep. The sergeant therefore got back to his place on the floor by Rouge's feet.

"This liquor or warm weather or somethin' has gone to my head," said Wally, as they went through the town, "but I'm goin' to trust you for once, Rouge. I'm goin' to try that road to the right. But first we'll have a look at the sign-post."

At the crossroads beyond the town the old iron sign-post was still in place, though half of one side was gone, and the other had several bullet holes through it. The sergeant leaned from his place and read the towns.

"Soissons, Braisne. It's broken off so I can't read the distance. Chery-Chartreuve twelve, Fismes, seventeen, Treloup, eighteen, Coulonges, eight, Ville en Tardenois, twenty."

"Write 'em down on slips o' paper an' put 'em in a hat. Then we'll draw one," suggested a passenger.

"We don't care a —— about Soissions or Treloup; read us off about Verdillot," said Wally.

"It don't say a thing about Verdillot," replied the sergeant.

"When you guys get through arguin' about the sign, I'll show you the road," said Rouge.

He began to roll himself a cigaret.

"That liquor went to my head all right," muttered Wally. "Rouge, which is the road?"

"The one to the right," replied Rouge.

"If it ain't the right one," said Wally darkly, as he swung the ambulance into the right hand road, "I know some guys that are goin' to take you apart an' see where that tickin' noise comes from."

The road curved slightly and then followed a sort of trough in the hills. On one side wheat fields rolled away out of sight, but on the other, the northern, the ground sloped upward to wooded heights. In places these woods came down to the edge of the road. The ambulance went slowly along. Wally watched on his side, and the sergeant and Rouge on their side, for any signs of troops or any one that looked like a medical officer getting ready to set up a dressing station. They saw nothing. There were one or two new shell holes in the road that Wally avoided with ease, and once in a while the ambulance would pass an ammunition carrier a night-signaling apparatus, an overcoat or a can of bully beef, that some marching soldier had thrown away the night before. On the fag end of a long march a soldier begins to jettison cargo, especially when the night is dark, and such things as emergency rations, intrenching tools and spare ammunition are the first to go.

"Is that it?" asked Wally, pointing suddenly to a collection of houses a little way off the road.

"No," said Rouge, "that there town has got green roofs and this here one we're goin' to has got red ones."

Another two or three kilometers brought no red-roofed town and the ambulance paused, while Rouge went back and asked for another loan of the canteen. It was passed out readily—too readily—and when Rouge shook it, it gave no sound. Rouge spoke as he felt and then returned to the front seat.

"I been doin' some thinkin'," said Wally, taking up the journey again, "an' that is that we ain't seen any troops. Dressin' stations is just as close to the line as they can get. Fere 'n Tardenois was took long ago and the outfits must be some way north. I'm goin' to take the next road north an' see what I see."

"You'll see a big flock of Dutch, I ain't kiddin'," replied Rouge. "My advice to you is to keep on this safe road an' not go huntin' for trouble. When we see a town with red roofs, that's it. It's on this road. If you go prowlin' off you'll sure run slam into a battle an' my hide is leaky enough with coot bites without gettin' bullets through it. Besides, think of the passengers."

"Yeh, think of the passengers," sneered Wally. "If we run into any boche I turn the old bus around an' the passengers is between you an' me an' the bullets. Maybe the next time they won't be so wise about drinkin' up all the likker without givin' us more'n enough to make us thirsty."

"Good for you," said Rouge. "You show signs o' progress, Wally. If you keep on like this for the next six months, you'll be half-witted."

THEY did indeed come to a small road that went northward. This road was at the edge of a town, but as the town was plainly marked Nesles, it was obvious that it was not the one they were searching for. As they turned into this road and began to climb the hill toward the woods, Rouge made a great show of settling his helmet and, removing his gas mask from the carrier, he let it hang by the intake tube on his chest. Wally kept his eyes on the road and pretended not to see, although he gave a snort or two of disdain. The sergeant took a slightly firmer hold of the dashboard. He had put his pack under him to ease the bumps and this he rearranged.

"I think Wally's right," said the sergeant. "You won't find any dressin' station skulkin' around the back areas."

The road, always mounting, crossed a section of woods, and then went down a gentle slope. At the far end of this slope was a town and the town had red roofs.

"There," said Wally, "what did I tell you? There's your town and your roofs an' everything."

"It ain't it," replied Rouge with conviction.

"No, it ain't it cause I found it," replied Wally, "but we're goin' into it just the same and get some dope. If it ain't the town we'll find some one that knows where the town is."

The ambulance entered the deserted street and passed slowly along it. This town was much smaller than Fere en Tardenois. It was little more than a hamlet. There were some American haversacks lying in the street, an empty rifle ammunition case, some O. D. blankets were hung to dry out of a window, and in front of the largest house an overcoat hung on the pickets of the iron railing. Wally brought the ambulance to a stop before this house. If there was any one in the village that knew anything, he would either be in this house or in the cellar under it.

"Go on in, Rouge," he directed, "an' wake some one up. There'll be some one in that house."

"I'll go in the one across the street," said the sergeant.

The two got down and Wally began to manufacture a cigaret. The passengers likewise descended and stamped up and down to stretch their limbs.

Rouge inspected the house. It was the ordinary small-town house, not a peasant's, but one that had perhaps belonged to the local doctor or lawyer. The door had an ornate iron grill over the place where the glass had once been, and the place of the glass had been taken by a sheet of corrugated iron. Rouge shoved open the door. An empty passage stretched before him.

"Hello, in there!" he called. No sound. He could, however, hear a murmur of voices down the hall, so he stepped in, closed the door, and clumped down the passage. The door from behind which he heard the voices was the last one, and before he knocked he took thought. The men on the other side might be officers. It was possible that he was breaking in on the deliberations of a divisional staff. Then he remembered that places that housed staffs were easily recognizable by the presence of large closed automobiles, numbers of motorcycles and many cigar butts under foot. There were no such signs here. Rouge thereupon pushed open the door.

The room was a kitchen. Against one wall was a huge stove, its top covered with utensils that gave out steam. A dozen men or more sat or stood about. The unusual thing about these men was that they were as naked as when they came into the world. They all turned and looked at Rouge, who quickly shut the door to keep out the cold air. The kitchen was like a Turkish bath.

"Can any of you fellars tell me where Verdillot is?" asked Rouge.

There was a sudden stir like wind in trees before a storm, a sudden passing of white flashes before Rouge's eyes and lo! the men were gone. A door in the far side of the room was open and through this Rouge could see little stretch of garden and a medium high wall, over which something white and gleaming passed, like a salmon jumping a waterfall. Rouge looked at them in stupefaction.

"What the —— is eatin' them?" he demanded of himself. He looked dumbly about. Ah! Rouge crouched and stiffened like a bird dog coming to a point. There were clothes, shirts, trousers and such, hanging on the wall and draped over a bench. These clothes were gray.

ROUGE did not remember opening the door. The passage without was miles long and he seemed to move along it with leaden feet. He was a long time getting the street door open.

In the street all was calm. The ambulance, its motor purring, stood as before. The sergeant, his hand on a doorknob, stood grinning and looking at something down the street. Wally also grinned. There was a group of passengers behind the ambulance lighting cigarets. Rouge fought for breath. He tried, as men do in dreams, to shout, and only gurgled. He could hear distant doors slamming, feet clattered overhead, there were faint cries. Rouge was glued to the doorstep as though by a heavy electric current. He felt that he would burst. At that instant Wally turned his head and saw Rouge.

"Glulp!" choked Rouge.

The smile left Wally's face as if it had been wiped off with a sponge. The sergeant gathered himself as does a diver and disappeared from Rouge's view. Suddenly the spell was broken.

"Boche!" shrieked Rouge. "Boche! boche! boche! Krauts, jerries, huns! The place is full of 'em!"

The American overcoat on the pickets of the fence seemed to mock him. The motor roared, and the ambulance spun backward a half circle. It seemed to scoop passengers into its interior. Dust flew in clouds. The hindquarters of a man, probably the sergeant, hung over the spare tire by the driver's seat. If the sergeant could dive, so could Rouge. He flung himself at the ambulance and hung like an ape, one foot in the second spare tire, the other one in air, and his hand desperately clinging to the hooks that carried the stretchers. A thin, trim-looking man in gray popped from a cellar, making motions as if he were drawing a cork from a bottle. What he held in his hand was not a bottle but a stick grenade, out of which he was pulling the string that set the affair working. This he threw with a high overhand swing.

Down the street other men, coatless and hatless, appeared. Sleepy faces peered out of windows. The ambulance began to go away. If the grenade burst, Rouge did not hear it, but he noticed that the ambulance was moving through smoke. The road was up hill and though the shaking was terrific, Rouge felt that the car was moving at a slightly slower pace than a man might walk if he wished to view the landscape. A little cluster of men in gray appeared in the road and put up their hands for the car to stop.

"Let 'er go, Wally!" yelled Rouge.

The sergeant's legs waved energetically above the spare tire. The car snored up the hill. A shock that nearly shook Rouge loose, and the men had been passed. Rouge swung at one with his free foot. He knew what that sudden shock meant. Wally had hit a calf once and nearly upset the ambulance and the shock meant that they had hit one or more men. It is surprizing what a thud a comparatively small animal makes when struck by a car moving at high speed.

The top of the hill was reached and the distant woods seemed to offer refuge. Rouge cast a look behind, but could see no sign of pursuit. The hooks were nearly cutting his hands off, but it was no time to think of that. The ambulance suddenly slowed down.

"Never mind me!" roared Rouge, "get goin'! The whole German army is after us!"

The car jerked forward, slowed again, sputtered, leaped forward, then slowed to a dead stop. *Phtt!* Rouge leaped down and ran to the driver's seat, dodging the flailing legs of the sergeant, which hung over the tire.

"Git goin'!" shrieked Rouge.

"The gas ain't runnin'!" replied Wally at the top of his lungs. "The line's shot through, or the carbureter ain't workin' or somethin'. Don't stand there like a—— fool! Git that hood up!"

Behind them the men heard a sound as of a high-powered car climbing the hill. The main difference was that instead of climbing, this car was descending.

Zoong!

Wally and Rouge lay down. From the car the passengers descended. It seemed as if the ambulance eructed them, so precipitate was their descent. Some came out the back and some out the little doors. Once on the ground, they went away. They skimmed like swallows across the landscape. So rapid was their flight that they seemed to bound like kangaroos. The sergeant, medical corps, untangled himself from the spare tire and, once his feet were on the ground, he regarded his departing men.

"The dirty cowards," said he.

He looked down the road where the high-powered something had dented the scenery, then he looked at the galloping passengers.

"I must go and bring them back," said he loudly.

Judging from the speed with which he pursued, he would soon outstrip the swiftest of those that fled.

Wally and Rouge rose from the ground. They looked behind them at the smoke and dust and ducked as once again they heard that growling roar that ended in a shriek of fiendish joy. This one landed in the field, and stalks of wheat went soaring, mingled with dirt, stones and uneven hunks of steel.

"Git up!" roared Wally. "They ain't fallin' close! Open that hood!"

Rouge tore at the hood fastenings, the hood went up, and then Wally appeared with a sack of tools.

"Go back and hang your ear over the tank!" cried Wally. "I'll unhitch the line and blow through it. If it bubbles the line is clear an' away we go an' if it don't bubble, the line is shot through."

"An' away we go just the same!" added Rouge.

"No, we don't," said Wally. "The skipper said the next ambulance I broke up I'd find on the payroll an' you figure out at six dollars an' a half a month how long it would take to buy."

Rouge fled to the tank and Wally unhitched the line. A third shell burst across the road in the opposite field. Wally hoped the Germans would not open on them with machine guns. A man might dodge shells, but a machine gun was serious. No machine gun chattered however. A soldier has much the same psychology, no matter what army he belongs to, and while a sleeping machine-gunner might not mind being awakened to repel an attack, or to destroy an incautious patrol, he would certainly be disgusted with the sentry that sounded an alarm for an ambulance, and that ambulance headed the other way. The artillery was different. The observers liked to have things to practise ranging on.

Wally applied his mouth to the end of the uncoupled gas line. He blew and his face became purple. Again he blew, nearly bursting his chest.

"What d'yuh hear, Rouge?" he coughed. "Hey, hammer-head! Hear any bubbles?"

Rouge stood with open mouth. He had not been listening for bubbles but for the approach of aerial express trains laden with hard luck.

Again Wally blew his soul into the gasoline pipe.

"Do you hear anything, you red-headed ijjut?" he yelled.

"No," said Rouge, still thinking of other things. "I don't hear nothin'. I bet I can beat you to them woods by three lengths."

WALLY looked helplessly toward the woods. They seemed to stretch out hands to him, offering shelter. There were undoubtedly holes in those woods, deep holes, in which a man might listen to bursting shells with indifference. Yet if the ambulance were left in the road it would only be a question of time before it would be destroyed. Wally had been rather prodigal of ambulances so far and the skipper might fulfill his threat of making him pay for the next one.

A shell burst so near that it showered Wally with dirt. But as he lay on the ground listening to the nasty whine and hum of shell fragments, he discovered something about the condition of the road between him and the woods. The next instant he was up and hauling Rouge from the ditch.

"Come outta that; you ain't no worm. Up an' give me a hand. We're gonna shove the old ship down to the woods."

"Yup," said Rouge, "you're a good guy, Wally. Give me your hand an' let's run just as fast as we can. There's some fellars we know over in them woods. Take hold of my hand an' we'll go see 'em."

"I ain't nuts!" shouted Wally. "Come up and give a shove! Come outta that! The road goes down hill a little!"

"Nice Wally!" said Rouge soothingly, seizing Wally's hand. "Come with me. I know where there's a nice bottle of coneyac a fellar hid."

"Ah, go to ——!" cried Wally, tearing his hand loose. "I'll do it myself."

Both men went down, for another shell burst. This one burst the closest of any and Wally feared for a tire. A hasty look as he got up showed him they were all intact. It was time to be going, though. Things were getting hot. He ran to the back of the ambulance and shoved. No action. Again he hurled himself against the rear of the car. Rouge came scrambling out of the ditch.

"Yuh —— fool!" yelled Rouge, "whaddyuh want to get me killed for? I never done nothing to you!"

Rouge shoved in his turn. The ambulance moved. They redoubled their efforts. They grunted, their hobnails tore at the road. The ambulance moved faster. The two then ran forward and both shoved. Then Wally jumped on the running board and guided the car with one hand. The ambulance began to roll faster and Rouge leaped on his side, but the speed slackened and both jumped off and pushed again. A howling shell encouraged them to fresh exertion. It landed behind them in the ditch, about where Rouge had lain, and a piece of it struck some part of the ambulance with a loud whack. The ambulance rolled steadily along, entered the woods, and rolled a few yards farther. Then meeting a slight up-grade again, it came to a halt and started to roll back, but Wally slammed on the emergency brake, and the car was still. Wally then turned his attention to the gas line again.

Once more Wally put his lips to the line and blew. He blew long and strongly and it seemed to him that this time the line was clear.

"Did it bubble, Rouge? Dig out your ears! Did it bubble, know-nothin'?"

"Naw!" replied Rouge.

Rouge being much nearer the ditch than the tank, there was a possibility that he could not hear if the tank did bubble. He looked into the woods to see whether there was any sign of the passengers. He looked toward the ditch, so near and yet so far. He listened for the arrival of a shell.

INSTEAD he heard a gasping cry from Wally, and then beheld that young man leaping up and down, spitting like an enraged cat.

"Come up here!" yelled Wally. "Why didn't you tell me that the line was clear? Didn't you hear me blowin' in the tank? I put the pipe in my mouth an' got set to blow an' sucked about a gallon of gas into myself. What d'yuh think I asked you to listen for, so you could look at the scenery?"

"I was just lookin' around a little," said Rouge. "I knew that as soon as you blew the line clear the gas would run out. Listenin' wouldn't do no good. I'm listenin' for G. I. cans rollin' down outta the clouds at me."

The two heard one coming at that second and betook themselves to the ditch. The shell landed with a sudden clump in the woods and they could hear branches crashing earthward. Wally was the first to rise and he took the occasion to swing his foot quite briskly against the still crouching Rouge.

"Git up outta that!" he ordered. "You want to stay here all day? The gas is runnin' outta that pipe like water through a sieve. Stir yourself!"

"Who the —— you kickin'?" demanded Rouge. "One o' these days I'll be givin' you a stomach full o' your own teeth!"

Wally, however, was in the road, already working to connect up the gas line again. He slammed down the hood and jumped to his seat.

"Wind her up!" he shouted. Rouge seized the crank and began to wind. His exertions were tremendous. A whole covey of shell burst near-by, but the motor suddenly took hold and Rouge galloped to his seat.

"Let 'er rip!" he shouted. "Go on, whaddyuh waitin' for? Forgot how to drive? You never did know a —— of a lot about it! Shove in the pedal an' pull that handle an' step on that other gimmick!"

"Button your mouth, Rouge," replied Wally, waving his hand impatiently. "The balloon companies lost a good man when you went to the medical corps. You could inflate one o' them balloons faster than the machine they got."

"Do you hear what I do?" asked Rouge suddenly.

From the woods beside the road came sounds of anger of protest, and of men running. Some men who were soon identified as the former passengers of the ambulance appeared on the edge of the ditch, hurdled it, and leaped into the ambulance.

"Git goin'!" they shouted. Others clambered in from the other side. The sergeant, medical corps, stood on the top of the bank. A mysterious hand shoved him headlong, but he picked himself up and gained his old place on the floor between Rouge's feet and the dashboard. A man, red-faced with rage, came rushing down to shake his fist at Wally, but his words were lost in the rush and roar of another shell.

The sergeant tried to flatten himself against the floor, but his pack, that had remained there all this time, was in the way. He shoved it with his hand, but Wally at that instant leaped the ambulance forward, the sergeant bumped his head against the dashboard, and the shell burst. The smoke of it was still thick when men stood up along the edge of the woods and hurled stones, branches and cans of bully beef at the ambulance.

"Get the —— out of here, you're drawing fire!" they roared. More cans clattered against the side of the car, but Wally needed no urging. The ambulance was already flying down the road.

"Hey, hey!" cried the sergeant, "I dropped my pack!"

"Never mind," shouted Rouge, "you won't have to carry it no more!"

"If you go back for it you'll get killed and then you won't have no use for it!" added Wally.

He pushed harder upon the accelerator and the car quickened its pace. It could not go very fast, loaded as it was, but it went fast enough, and in the intervals when the bumping and jarring of the ambulance made less noise, those on the seat could hear scratchings and muffled shouts of protest from within. Nevertheless, the retreat of the ambulance continued at top speed. They passed through the woods and descended the hill on the other side with the speed of a falling shell. The road forked and Wally took the left hand turn, although he had no idea of where it would take him and did not remember passing this fork on the way up. This brought them then to the main highway, but some distance down the road from Nesles, which they could see behind them. Wally stopped the car and a wild howl went up from the passengers.

"Hey! Go on! Step on her! Git tuh —— outta here before one falls on us!"

"LISTEN," said Wally bitterly, "where do we go? I move we have a little discussion. I run this car into the boche once and that's all I want to in a day. Where's the front line? I don't know. Well, I don't turn a wheel till I know where I'm goin' and how far it is. Them that don't like it can get out an' walk. I'm only a poor driver; I got a car an' a feeble-minded orderly, I'm the sole support of, an' my life is precious to me if to no one else."

"I know where the front line is," said the sergeant. "It's in them woods. We run for 'em when the shellin' started an' was gonna dive into a trench. Do you think they'd let us? If them doughs swarmed that way in front of a boche attack, the war would be over tomorrow. All they could say was we were drawin' fire. Well, we argued an' they got mad and then we got mad, an' then the shells started to flop down in the woods round where the doughs were sleepin', so we came away. I bet they threw a week's rations at us."

"Rouge," said Wally, "just what the —— did you get into up in that town? The sergeant was rappin' at the door on his side o' the street when all of a sudden the place is full of a whole flock of Adams. We was laughin' at 'em when I see you in the door, and all this gang yells, 'Boche!' Well, boy, I had the car turned around before they opened their mouths."

"An' away you went and for all the thought you give me I might still be back there, gettin' ready to finish the war by gettin' stewed up for butter!" added Rouge.

"No such thing," denied Wally stoutly. "You come sailin' out o' that door like the American Eagle. I knew you'd take hold somewhere. I never left you yet on no field of battle."

"Not while my bread hooks are workin' and there's a place to hang on to," replied Rouge.

"Well, how come the boche are all like September Morn?" asked the sergeant. "They ought to have more savvy than to sleep in light marchin' order so near the front."

"They wasn't sleepin'," said Rouge, "they was in there takin' a hot bath an' steamin' the coots outta their clothes. It was just on my tongue to tell 'em about the hot wire scheme when they took a good grip with their toes an' shoved. Then I seen their uniforms an' I did some shovin' on my own hook."

"You sure they was boche?" asked the sergeant. "All them blankets that hung out the windows and overcoats and things were American. How would you know they was boche if they didn't have no clothes on?"

"They was boche all right!" said Rouge. "I poked my head in the door and they must have thought the American Army was in back of me. And that guy that socked the grenade at us was a boche, too. I seen his uniform."

"Oh, they was boche," said Wally. "If they hadn't all been asleep we'd have been marchin' on Berlin now."

From within the ambulance came a drumming of fists and muffled shouts.

"Hey, there's a war on! Get on outta here! This road's in range!"

"Pile off, Rouge," said Wally patiently, "and see what it says on that mile post."

The sergeant made way and Rouge obediently descended, crossed the road and bowed over the tiny white post. Wally and the sergeant drew in their breaths and exclaimed in wonderment.

"It don't say nothin'," said Rouge, getting up, "it's just a number on it."

"What's the matter with you?" asked the sergeant. "You're kinda givin' way here an' there."

"Huh?" gasped Rouge.

He twisted himself about so that he might look at his back and then he surveyed himself from the front. The seam of his breeches that joined one leg with the other had begun to burst. In addition, both shoulders of his blouse had come away from the sleeves, and the back seams had begun to let go for some distance.

"I thought I felt kinda loose!" muttered Rouge. "These here clothes they give us fall away if you look at 'em. When a guy has to do anythin' like makin' a flyin' leap for an ambulance, or pushin' said ambulance a mile or so uphill an' windin' said ambulance up, he bursts out of his clothes."

From the seat Wally gave a loud crow of laughter.

"You're full o' backwash!" he cried. "You went an' burned all the thread outta them seams with that hot wire you was killin' coots with!"

"No," said the sergeant in dismay, "now is that so?"

"No, it ain't," replied Rouge hotly. "I didn't burn no thread, nothin' but eggs."

"I was just gettin' my hopes up that I'd found something that would kill 'em," said the sergeant sadly. "How long you had that blouse?"

"About a couple months," replied Rouge. "It always fit me a little snug and when I got to doin' any great exertion, course the seams burst."

"I think you're right," said the sergeant. "Anyway a man would have to be careful with that wire. An' then if he does burn out the thread he can always draw a new blouse and still be free of 'em. I think that's a good scheme after all."

From the back of the ambulance came the sound of men descending. Before Wally could decide what it meant, a solemn-faced party of men appeared. He recognized them as his passengers.

"Where you goin'?" demanded Wally.

"We're goin' to walk!" replied one of the men. "We held a little council o' war an' we decided our feet was the safest things. We ain't but belly punchers an' iodine spillers an' the like o' that, but I notice the first thing one o' the brave fightin' men does when he gets a crack is to begin to yelp for us. We got our duty to do an' a place to go an' we'd like to get there before dark.

"Yes," exclaimed another, "an' all you've done with us is to take us into the boche lines and then bring us out again an' get us beat up by our own doughs."

"We ain't filled with cravin' to be no peas in no rattle. You drive too wild. I heard tell it takes two shops an' a mobile repair unit workin' double shift to keep you in ambulances." This from some one in the rear rank.

"It wasn't so bad at first," said the first speaker, "but our encouragement is all gone. We come off so quick we couldn't bring but the one canteen full."

"You all done talkin'?" asked Wally finally. "Every one said all he's got on his mind? Well, listen to me a second. I got orders to take you guys to Verdillot. Where the —— is Verdillot? If any of you knows, speak up. I don't know. And I ain't a mind reader; this sector is brand new to me. If any one's got any suggestions, spit 'em out. I've got a sergeant and an orderly that's as much good as footwarmers in ——. All they do is talk about their coots."

"You needn't try to work it off on to me!" cried Rouge. "Boy, if ignorance was noise, you'd make more racket than the massed divisional bands. I told you I knew where this here town was an' that you could tell it by the red roofs an' you go kitin' off over the hills like a hen hawk full o' silo juice."

"Whaddyuh mean, red roofs?" said a passenger. "All French towns got red roofs."

"Well, some are redder than others," replied Rouge.

This was true, especially in this district, although Rouge did not know the reason. In 1914 the first battle of the Marne had raged here and some of the towns had suffered heavily. The new tile with which the damage done to the roofs by artillery fire had been repaired gave the houses a glaring red aspect against the surrounding green.

"Get in," said the sergeant. "I'm responsible here. If you guys get lost or anything, it's my neck. An' if I want to discuss delousin' measures with some one, that's my business. It's part of the medical corps' job, ain't it? How come this hunger for work all of a sudden anyway? None of you *hombres* showed any signs of beggin' for work before."

"They ain't hungerin' for work," said Wally. "They're hungerin' for a place where they can get down cellar."

"That may be," replied the spokesman for the passengers, "but we don't see any signs o' gettin' anywhere except killed by stayin' in this conveyance. So we guess we'll hoof it."

"You can do as you please," said Wally, "but I got orders to go to Verdillot an' I'm goin'."

The temptation was too great for the passengers, and as the ambulance went by them they clambered hastily aboard. Again the car roared along the road, following a snake-like track because of the shell holes. Shortly it labored up a long hill and from the top of it the whole sector lay spread before them.

"Now look around," said Wally, applying the brake, "an' if you see any town with red roofs, we'll go find it."

Eastward they could see a distant forest, green hills and the rolling country toward Rheims. North, more hills. Toward the south the shattered spires of churches, and uneven tangles of roof beams disclosed a distant town. They could see but one road, far away, too far to see whether it bore traffic or not. There was no sign of war except the solitary airplanes, each with his accompaniment of smoke balls from bursting anti-aircraft shrapnel, white or black, according to the nationality of the men that fired on him.

"THERE'S some of our guys down there in the ditch," said Wally suddenly, pointing down the hill before him. "We can go down and see if they know anything about Verdillot."

"It ain't in sight from here," said Rouge. "Them red roofs would show up like a bottle o' wine in a Sunday School. Go slow on runnin' downhill after guys you see movin'. The last time you took us down hill you know what we got into—O. D. blankets hung out to dry an' everything."

"Well, what would you like to do?" demanded Wally. "All you got to do is express your wish. I hear it's wisest to humor these birds that are off their conk. I'm willin' to listen, if only to give myself a little amusement."

"Say, speakin' o' boche," began the sergeant, "I was just thinking. Now, they was takin' a steam treatment, them birds you run into in the house. Just how did they go about it? You didn't smell kerosene around there, did you?"

"Well, now as to that," began Rouge, taking hold of his lower lip, "I can't hardly say. It seems to me they had buckets around and were just givin' themselves a sort of wash-off. If I could have waited a few minutes they would most like have got to hunting around their clothes. My experience with krauts is that they got somethin' eatin' 'em most o' the time and they certainly wouldn't go to all the trouble to take off their clothes just to give themselves a Sattaday night kind o' bath."

"Ah, they're off again," cried Wally. "You two are worse than a couple of old women talkin' about their appendix. I'm goin' down the hill."

As the ambulance drew near the foot of the slope all three men on the front looked earnestly ahead. There were numbers of men in the ditch and now others could be seen in the fields, lying down in small groups, hiding behind hay-stacks, or crawling cautiously forward. These men wore olive drab, the steel helmet of the American forces, and had every appearance of being Americans. The ambulance, however, moved slower and slower. The enemy had been known to appear in American uniforms before now. Suddenly one of the men in the ditch began to speak. He stood up to his full height and hurled something to the ground with all his might.

"I hain't no objection to bein' killed by a good clean bullet!" cried the speaker, "but I'll be ——— and fried in niggar grease if I'm goin' to be pisened by eatin' any more o' that glue tastin' hoss meat!"

"He's an American," said the three men on the ambulance.

Wally increased the speed until he came up to the first men in the ditch who looked at him with little interest. They were dirty and tired looking, their uniforms were yellow with clay, and torn from the wearers' endless crawling on their stomachs. They were eating stolidly from cans, digging out bits of meat with little squares of hardtack and then eating the whole. Some drank from their canteens, slowly and carefully, as if they were watchful of their water supply. Their blouse collars were unhooked and the blouses open down to the tops of the gas mask carriers, so that the men might breathe the freer. It was clear that these men had not been long from the battle.

"Hey!" cried Wally, leaning over the spare tire. "Any of you *hombres* know where Verdillot is?"

"What the —— is Verdillot?" asked one.

"It's a town with a lot o' red roofs," interrupted Rouge.

"Now, shut up," muttered Wally. "What are you always tryin' to make a bum outta me for?"

"I ain't tryin' to make a bum outta you," denied Rouge indignantly. "The good job you done yourself is too plain to be seen."

"I c'n see a red roof from here," spoke up a doughboy.

"Where?" cried the three on the ambulance together.

"Sittin' on the seat of a ambulance," grinned the doughboy.

"That so?" cried Rouge. "Well, I can see a —— fool an' I don't need no field glasses either."

Here a sergeant, who having taken over command of a platoon, due to the decease of a lieutenant, felt it his duty to intervene.

"Gwan," he commanded, standing up and waving his hand, "get the —— out of here with that truck. The first thing you know we'll have a swarm of iron bees buzzin' around here."

"There's no use gettin' hard-boiled," spoke up the medical corps sergeant. "I got just as many stripes on my arm as you have. Now I'm goin' to ask you a civil question. Try and understand it. Do you know where Verdillot is? It's a town."

All this talking and the sight of an ambulance stopped in plain sight on the road was liable to draw trouble sooner or later. It arrived in the person of a breathless officer.

"Here!" he cried. "What are you men doing here with that ambulance?"

"We're congressmen givin' the war the once over. Don't forget to vote next fall—" This in a muffled voice from the interior.

The officer went immediately to the rear of the ambulance.

"Who said that?" he demanded.

Heavy silence.

"Did you?"

"No, sir."

"Did you?"

"No, sir."

On the front seat Wally began to sing softly:

"Up steps the M. P.; the M. P. sez to me
'Wherever are you goin' an' your pass I'd like to see.'
I sez to him sez I 'My pass I'll gladly show,
If you'll tell me where a guy can see the roofs of Verdillot.' "

"That ain't right!" said Rouge quickly. "That ain't the song at all. You tryin' to kid me?"

THE officer here appeared at Wally's elbow.

"Where are you trying to go with this bunch of jailbirds?" he demanded.

"We're trying to find a town called Verdillot, sir, to put up a dressing station."

"Well, I don't know where Verdillot is, but there's a town down the road a way, where a doctor has been yelling for an ambulance and some medical personnel for an hour or more. Maybe that's the town. I don't know the name of it myself."

"That's it," cried every one excitedly.

"Has it got red roofs?" asked Rouge.

The officer regarded him sternly.

"I don't know," said he in an icy voice, "but I know where there's a guard-house that has."

Wally here gently let in the clutch and the ambulance began to move. The officer watched it disappear down the road.

"Good luck to you," he muttered. "There's a nice bunch of prospects lost to the labor battalion."

The men in the ditch turned once more to their hardtack and bully beef.

"What was this song you was hummin'?" asked the sergeant.

"I don't know," said Wally. "It's one o' Rouge's things he picked up in some guard-house. I think he learned it when they was tryin' him for swipin' a set of instruments out of the operatin' room for the cook to cut meat with."

Rouge began without further urging:

" 'I know a better place,' the M. P. kindly said,
'Where you can eat on tables an' recline upon a bed,
They gives you, free of charge, some dungarees so gay,
And all you have to do is gather honey every day.' "

"Shut up that croakin'," said Wally. "Here's the town. Hang on now in case I have to make a quick exit."

This was quite a sizable collection of houses. There was a square, paved, with a fountain in the middle. On the opposite side of the square was a row of houses, some with walls and no roof, and others with the roof sagging and no walls. The ambulance rumbled across the square, moving slowly and cautiously, and then turning the corner, Wally could see a mass of rubbish across the street, barring the way. This rubbish was mostly tables, boxes, wine barrels and broken carts. As he looked, the mass seemed to move about and take shape. That pile of rubbish was a barricade.

"Ah!" cried a hearty voice, "that's what I call devotion! That's what I call bravery!"

A tall fleshy man rose suddenly from the cellar entrance of what had once been a grocery store, judging from the fact that the building still bore the sign, E. Vivie, Alimentation de Choix. The tall man dashed across the street and began to wring the sergeant's hand. He dragged him from the ambulance and then seized Rouge. This man was a doctor, that was plain at the first glance. He had a deep chest and a large stomach. His helmet was on the top of his head and the cuffs of his blouse were turned back from huge red hands.

"Come, come, boys," said the doctor, "jump out! I've been waiting for you for an hour or more. There's lots of work for you to do here. We're expecting a counterattack any minute and I want to get one load out anyway. The field on the other side of the town is full of wounded."

"Is this Verdillot?" asked Wally faintly. "I got orders to go to Verdillot."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, "this is Verdillot or Merdillot or anything you want to call it."

He had double joints and kept spreading his great fingers into a duck's-foot formation, the way double jointed people do. "I must say you boys have nerve, bringing us up an ambulance right in front of the infantry!"

Tac-tac-tac-tac!

There was a clanking of helmets as three men tried to lie down on the floor in front of the seat. There was hardly room enough for one and Rouge, the first one down, was badly bruised against brake and clutch pedal by the sergeant and Wally, who were on top of him.

"Here, boys, jump out of that ambulance," yelled the doctor. "Never mind this little racket. Those are just our boys sighting up their machine guns. This town has changed hands three times today already. There's no one in here but machine gunners now, in case the boche proceed their next rush by a bombardment. We expect a counter-attack any minute and you boys can't get the wounded out of this cellar too fast. Jump now."

The medical personnel got sadly down from the back of the ambulance and looked vaguely at the doctor.

THEY could see nothing there but the barricade, the muzzle of a machine gun sticking out of a cellar window, and a man in the upper room of a house looking at something with his field glasses. Again the machine gun rattled. It was answered faintly from the woods, a far-off coughing, like the engine of a threshing machine that one hears across hay-fields on a summer day. The men shivered. The boche were in those woods and that was an enemy machine gun coughing.

"Snap out of it!" roared the doctor. "Sergeant, take these men down cellar and start them loading wounded into the ambulance. Take the worst cases first. Then when you've put in a load, hang a few slight cases on the outside and bring your men over by the church. There are a lot of wounded there that need dressing. Work fast, now. I don't want to see any of you ducking because of a little thing like a barrage. Remember the tradition of the medical corps. Driver, when you've got your load, drive like —— and get back as soon as you can."

The sergeant went down cellar with his men, and the doctor, after pointing out the worst cases to them, leaped up the stairs again and ran over toward the church.

"Boy, don't them pill rollers look pleased," said Wally, swinging the ambulance around and backing up to the cellar steps.

"Don't they?" agreed Rouge. "You'd think they was goin' to be hung. Well, I suppose I better get off an' give 'em a hand."

He stopped suddenly, one foot still on the step and looked intently at something.

"Look, Wally!" he said.

He pointed to a sign, clearly visible on the wall of a building.

COULONGES

It was painted black on a white background, done by German painters so that their truck drivers, column guides, and what-not could read as they ran, without stopping.

"This here ain't Verdillot," said Rouge in a tragic whisper, "an' I told you it wasn't."

"Rouge," said Wally, "you're as comfortin' to me as the horrors to a man with boils. You can figure me takin' this ambulance away from that captain medico, can't you? If you and that dumb pill rollin' sergeant could have forgot your coots a minute and lent a little assistance to the discussion, maybe we wouldn't be here now."

"I told you that Verdillot was a town with red roofs," replied Rouge. "Well, if you ain't got any more brains than to go bargin' into a town that ain't got any roofs at all, let alone red ones, then you ain't got any moan comin'. I been sittin' here on this seat listenin' to you belly-ache at me for three months or more. When any good stunt is pulled off, it's you and when we get in a mess, it's me. Well, I'll say this here and now, loud an' clear, that if sense was a forest fire, you couldn't light a match."

"Go on, Rouge," said Wally, "unwind yourself. You don't bother me. I got a gas tank to look at an' lubricatin' oil to think about."

"No, I suppose talkin' to you is about as much use as arguin' to a statue. A statue ain't got nothin' in its head but cement, neither."

Rouge thereupon descended from the ambulance and went to the back to assist loading the wounded.

Wally inspected the gas level, the oil and his four tires. All O. K. He rolled a cigaret and looked apprehensively at the barricade. There would be no amusement in having a counter-attack start, with him still in the town. Wally did not know much about infantry tactics, but he did know that the instant a town or a fortified farm was captured, the assaulting troops mopped up the dugouts as quickly as possible and took to their heels, leaving only a few machine gunners and auto riflemen behind, for once the enemy learned of his loss, he would immediately subject the place to heavy bombardment and do his utmost to recapture the place by a counter-attack. In this particular town the barricade was to keep out enemy patrols, the machine gunners kept the town and its surroundings clear and observed the enemy lines, and the men in the ditch and fields above the town waited, safely out of range of the barrage, to rush down and stave off the counter-attack when it materialized. The position of an ambulance, and especially its driver, during the preliminary bombardment of the town would certainly be precarious.

Rouge had climbed in the back, let down the seats, ran out the stretcher hooks to within easy reach, and otherwise prepared the interior of the ambulance to receive its new passengers. The packs of the medical corps men he unloaded and piled against the wall of the building. Suddenly a machine gun went into action in a house near the barricade. The gun was in one of the upper rooms and the racket it made in that confined space was tremendous.

"Hey, get a wiggle on with them wounded!" yelled Rouge down the stairs.

The first stretcher, however, was on its way up, a blanket-covered form on it, and two nervous-eyed former passengers grunting at the handles. Across the square the doctor shouted at them, and his profane urging to hasten loading came to them faintly.

"How many blankets you puttin' on 'em?" asked Rouge. "Don't put on more than one, because all I got to give you is four."

"We'll look out for it," said the men and went down cellar for another stretcher.

The ambulance was supposed to leave a proportionate number of blankets for those they took away on the wounded—else a dressing station would very soon run out of coverings.

ANOTHER gun joined its cackling to the first, and a shell, sender unknown, slammed somewhere in the back-yards.

"Hey, you don't need me, do you?" called Rouge down the stairs. "You got enough men to lug stretchers. Here's your blankets. Load 'em in an' holler when she's full. I'll stop when we get outta range an' put down the curtain." He ran then to the front and leaped to his seat. "By ——, Wally," he cried, "I never did see a gang take more time to load than this one!"

Thump! went the second stretcher, then after an age of time they heard the squealing of the rollers as the third was shoved in. Wally increased the speed of the motor. Faint shouts from the upper end of the town and an increase in the machine gun fire. They were all going now. Shells, the sound of their approach drowned by the clatter of the machine guns, began to burst everywhere. The doctor started to cross the square, but a shell slammed down and shut out the view of both doctor and church. He had not been hit, though, for the two on the seat of the ambulance could see him jump up and run through the smoke to the shelter of the church. He waved his arms at them, in appeal or anger, and then disappeared.

Thump! went the last stretcher.

"Let 'er go!" came a faint cry.

"Let 'er go!" yelled Wally. The motor roared, the clutch took hold and they started to go.

"Hey, wait a minute!" Some one was running beside the ambulance, holding on to the seat. Rouge reached out his hand and the man, taking a leap, landed on the floor at Rouge's feet. The newcomer was a walking case, a man who had been hit in the head or face, for his countenance was completely hidden by a huge white bandage, out of which one eye looked wildly.

"Here, git up on the seat," said Rouge.

"We don't want you faintin' an' doin' a Brodie into the road. We're goin' to move fast for the next few minutes."

He changed places with the wounded man and the ambulance came to the hill down which they had rolled so swiftly a short time before. The return journey was not so swift.

THERE was a sudden roar behind them like flames when a blower is turned on. Wally kept his eyes grimly on the road ahead and shoved down hard on the accelerator, but Rouge, sitting on the floor, could see the town they had just left gushing black smoke. The counter attack was under way.

"It's tough on them pill rollers to have to stay in that town an' maybe get gathered in," yelled Rouge.

"Never mind *them*," shouted back Wally. "They ain't crippled and can run. You an' me have got to stick to this ambulance. What we got in back there? I want to know so I can decide whether I can make speed or not."

"They ain't any of 'em serious," cried Rouge quickly.

"How the —— do you know? You could have stood there an' watched 'em bein' loaded just as well as sittin' on the seat. Now we gotta run slow on the chance there's some one hit bad in there."

"There any guys hit bad back there?" Rouge asked, turning suddenly to the bandaged man.

The latter looked at Rouge with his one eye, but his mouth being covered by a bandage, his reply was inaudible.

"There's no use askin' him, you know that!" said Wally acidly. "He don't know whether the other guys are hit bad or not. How the —— could he? He maybe never saw 'em before they lugged 'em up the stairs."

"I wish you'd shake out a little less conversation an' a little more speed," replied Rouge. "There's a war on an' we're in it, an' this road is in range."

They reached the top of the hill finally, but instead of snoring across the short stretch of level and plunging down the other side of the slope, Wally drove the ambulance at very reduced speed, carefully avoiding shell holes and anything that would tend to bump the passengers. Rouge from his seat on the floor could see a few groups of infantry, working cautiously downhill toward the town. It occurred to him that there was a fine view from that hilltop and that a good third of the country in view was probably occupied by enemy troops. Rouge suddenly listened with hand behind his ear. He heard a cracking like a man snapping his fingers rapidly. Bullets!

"Hey get a move on, Wally! Stand on her! We're under fire!"

A cloud of dust rose from the road-bed, as if a vehicle had passed at high speed. The bandaged man gurgled. The dust cloud swept toward the ambulance. Clattering, as if some one rapped the wheels with a stick, ensued, and after that a great bumping.

"We're down! we're down!" shrieked Rouge. "They shot off both our tires!"

"Keep your shirt on," said Wally, grimly watching the road ahead. "Lean out an' see if we got anything through the body."

Rouge accordingly leaned out but saw no bullet holes through the upper part of the ambulance, which meant that none of the passengers had received a fresh wound that would have required a halt, the taking out of the passenger, and a dressing. The enemy had turned on an indirect machine gun barrage; that is to say, they sighted their guns by a map, so that the fire would fall on that road, although the gunners themselves could not see it. This barrage would sweep up and down and keep men from crossing the road to reinforce the Americans in the town. The Germans always trained their guns very low, so that the bullets only cleared the ground by a few inches. If a man stood up he was hit in the leg and if he lay down he was hit in the body. But in the case of the ambulance, this had been a salvation, for the bullets had passed between the body and the road, damaging nothing but the tires and smashing a spoke or two.

The ambulance now limped. Wally was forced to still further reduce the speed, in order to lessen the jolting to the passengers. He knew, as any medical corps man would, that a bump that was hardly noticeable to a well man, is a very terrible thing to a wounded one; especially if the wounded man has a leg bone splintered by a bullet, or has his jaw shot away, or some equally pleasant wound.

"Oh, ——!" moaned Rouge, "shake a reef out of her, will you? I ain't ready to die yet. We're liable to get another burst any second and it'll be on my side, too."

"What dyuh think?" cried Wally. "Ain't I got my own neck on this seat? You ain't got no monopoly on gettin' killed."

The wounded man rolled his one eye and gurgled in sympathy.

They came at last to the eastern slope of the hill and went slowly down.

"We change tires here," said Wally. "I hope no more than two is gone."

"Change tires?" cried Rouge. "Are you shell-shocked or what? Change tires in front o' the whole German army?"

"Shut up," said Wally, "an' get out the jack. Them boche can't bend shells over this hill an' it's too thick for bullets to come through."

"All right," said Rouge reluctantly, as he made way for Wally to descend. "If I'm goin' to be a Roman holiday, let's make a fast job of it."

On the seat the wounded man rolled his one eye again.

The ambulance was jacked up by Rouge, while Wally unscrewed the nuts that held the rim to the wheel. Both tires on the right-hand side of the ambulance were gone, but by a miracle, those on the other side had not been touched, and as the car carried two spares, all was yet well. The car was raised, the tire pulled off, and Wally ran around to the other side of the car for the spare. A voice spoke from the interior of the ambulance.

"Hey, what's comin' off?"

"'S all right, buddy," cried Rouge cheerfully, "we'll be off again in a minute. Just lookin' at a tire."

"We outta range yet?" asked the voice.

"Sure! long ago," lied Rouge.

Ensued scrambling within and a head appeared over the tail gate.

"Hey, get back in there!" cried Rouge. "You ain't anywhere yet." The owner of the head, showing a surprizing knowledge of ambulances, unhooked the tail gate and clambered to the ground.

"Come on, Jerry," called the man who had got down from the ambulance, "we're outta range."

WALLY appeared around the corner of the car with the spare tire over his shoulder. Two more men clambered out of the ditch at a little distance and came toward the ambulance. One of these had a bandaged arm. From the interior of the car another man crawled and others, undoubtedly those in the upper bunks, clamored for aid to descend. Wally and Rouge stood open-mouthed and speechless. These wounded men, besides having a very healthy color, were strangely familiar to both the ambulance driver and the orderly.

"Man," said a voice, "I'm glad to get this off, I ain't kiddin'."

The walking case had descended from the front seat and was removing the bandage from his head. A few more turns and it fell about his neck, revealing the countenance of the sergeant, medical corps, who had been in charge of the passengers.

"Well, I'll be a dragged down, shoved up, blue-eyed —— from Boston!" declared Rouge.

The two passengers in the upper bunks descended in their turn and began to fold up blankets, pull out stretchers, and folding them, hang them on their hooks on the side of the ambulance. The two men who had appeared from the ditch removed their new white bandages and arranged the seats again for well passengers. Wally looked at them all, one by one. There was not a man missing. It was the detail that was supposed to set up the dressing station in Verdillot.

"Good!" said Wally, hurling the spare tire to the ground. "Now you wise *hombres* can busy yourselves changin' these tires."

"Where the —— did you come from?" gasped Rouge.

"You don't mean to say you're so dumb you don't get that?" cried Wally. "Why, they went down cellar an' then lugged themselves out again on the stretchers. An' I suppose you two— "turning to the men who had appeared from the ditch—" put in the last stretcher and hopped on behind."

"I think it was a pretty wise stunt, don't you?" grinned the sergeant.

"No, I don't!" replied Wally indignantly. "I think you're a bunch of yellow-backs. The idea of goin' off an' leavin' a lot o' wounded guys. You can laugh all you want to. If any o' them dies because he didn't get out in time, it'll be your fault!"

"We may be yellow an' all that," said a passenger contentedly, "but we're still alive."

"An' we're still lookin' for Verdillot," added the sergeant.

"You guys ought to be strung up by the

thumbs!" said Rouge hotly. "We was all set to get outta here with a load an' never come back an' you birds appear an' all our hard luck starts over again."

"No wonder you're sore!" sympathized the passengers.

"Well, bend your backs on the tires," said Wally, "or we don't go anywhere."

The passengers cheerfully enough put on the tire and one let down the jack while the other tightened the nuts. They then went to the front tire and prepared to remove that.

"No, but no kiddin'," began the sergeant, "they didn't have no rush cases in that cellar. There was only three bad ones, one was dead, an' the other would be in half an hour an' the third guy didn't want to be moved. He said that it was takin' too many chances to try to get him out in daylight, with the road in plain sight of the boche all the way an' he was comfy enough where he was. The rest of 'em was sufferin' mostly from flesh wounds an' cold feet. An' it wasn't Verdillot anyway, that town was called Coulonges or something like that."

"Now, listen," said Rouge, "there was a pill roller in there lookin' after them wounded and he was a sergeant too, because I seen him when I looked down the stairs an' he was the one hollered 'Let 'er go!' when all the stretchers was in. He must have been blind and deaf to let you get away with your stuff."

"No," said the sergeant, "he wasn't blind nor deaf, but he was kinda thirsty, an' so we left him that French canteen we had."

"But I thought that was empty!" cried Rouge and Wally in a breath.

"Well, it was," said the sergeant, "but we put a little water in it and that made the noise and there was plenty of smell when you took out the cork, so the sergeant will be satisfied till he takes a few hookers an' waits at the church for the recoil."

"How come you put all that bandage on?" asked Wally, after a short pause. "That was a scientific job."

"Yeh, the old sergeant did that. He claimed he used to be a male nurse at Bellevue before the war. You see the stretcher cases was covered up with a blanket, but I'd have to ride, an' if we met the doctor before we got out o' town there might have been trouble, so we put on a head bandage as prescribed for third degree buccal lesions."

"Well, let's change the tires anyway," said Wally with a resigned air.

He shoved his helmet on the back of his head and hunted for cigaret material.

"By ——!" he exclaimed, blowing on a book of papers to separate the leaves, "Sherman should have been an ambulance driver. If he had been, they wouldn't dare repeat what he said.'"

It took but a little time to change the tires, even though the work was interrupted by a shell or two that burst above them on the hillside.

THE men could still hear the rattling of machine-guns and the thumping of shells where the ownership of Coulonges was being disputed.

"That's one way we don't need to think about goin'," decided Wally.

He tried to remember what the road was like that they had come over.

"We been north," he decided, "an' it ain't there, an' we been east as far as we could, an' it ain't there. Goin' back to Fere 'n Tardenois won't get us a thing but a lot o' ——! Well, sergeant, what d'yuh think? You're in charge; what'll we do now?"

The sergeant was regarding Rouge.

"Kid," said he musingly, "that wire scheme of yours is a dud. You sure enough are comin' unglued."

"It wasn't the wire," said Rouge. "They sew these uniforms up with paper thread. I been crankin' the motor and luggin' stretchers and changin' tires an' that's what burst out the seams."

The seams of Rouge's blouse, from shoulder to skirt, had parted company with the cloth, and his blouse hung on him now like a herald's tabard, the rear section fluttering in the wind. The sleeves had come away from the body and were only kept from falling off entirely by the double stitching of the shoulder straps.

"Don't cough," said the sergeant, "or you'll have a cold ride to wherever we're goin'."

"I see there's no help to be got from you two," said Wally. "Any time I ask for a little serious thought the subject turns to coots. You, Rouge, I hope you get tried for spoilin' that uniform. Let's go."

"I think myself it's not a safe method," observed the sergeant, as the three got on the seat and the passengers leaped in behind. "It would be tough to burn the seams out of a guy's clothes in the winter time. Those boche must have had some method o' steamin' their clothes. It's too bad you couldn't have stopped a second or two and found out what it was."

"Ain't it!" said Rouge sarcastically. "I shoulda known better than to be hangin' round Y huts. If I'd stayed outta the Y, I wouldn't have found the book, nor read no such crazy stunt as burnin' coots with hot wires."

He gave a slight writhing motion, such as a shimmy dancer employs and rubbed his back against the ambulance body.

"The stunt didn't work, anyway. I still got 'em," he added bitterly.

The ambulance again took up its journey.

"Where yuh goin' now?" asked the sergeant.

"I'm goin' back to that town we passed when we first came up," said Wally, "an' see if we can get any sense out of 'em there. It's gettin' late an' I'd like to find this place before dark."

The ambulance now went forward without hesitation. If they came to a shell hole Wally managed to miss it with all but one wheel and thumps would resound from within. The sergeant, after his fourth journey to the roof, ventured to protest.

"We lost a lotta time," replied Wally, "nursin' this old wreck along the road so that we wouldn't hurt the wounded men inside and we got a long way to go yet."

"It won't do any good to turn up anywhere with a load o' broken necks."

Wally made no reply. They had just passed the road that led over the hill to the town where Rouge had surprized the boche bathers and could see, some distance farther on, the black walls of the town where they had first turned off. The town was deserted no longer. For some time, ever since the shadows had first begun to lengthen and the sun to draw closer to the western hills, the sector had begun to stir and to grumble and to mutter, like a sleeping man coming back to wakefulness.

Perhaps the crackling of machine guns and pound of shells at Coulonges had aroused it, but more probably it was just the natural stirring preparatory to the taking up of the night's work. In the little town before them the men on the ambulance could see a long column of mules, each harnessed to a tiny cart. This was a machine gun column. The guns are carried on these carts up to the very nearest point that they can reach to the enemy, and then the guns are unloaded and carried by hand. The line crossed the road and forced Wally to slow down and then to stop. He was past the first houses of the town now and had already seen the big placard with the town's name, "Nesles."

"Here comes hard luck!" said Wally suddenly. "I knew if I had to stop in this town I'd run into some."

A man had looked at them from a cellar window and then disappeared and come bounding into the road. He drew near, waving his hand and the men could see that he wore the insignia of an officer of the medical corps.

"You took off them bandages too soon," muttered Rouge.

"Here, you!" cried the officer, "have you got some medical personnel in there? We've been waiting for you all the afternoon! Pile out! An attack's going to start any minute and we want to be ready. Get that ambulance off the road. Come! Signs of life!"

Another voice spoke excitedly from the opposite side of the ambulance.

"Here! Don't let this ambulance get away. I've got a bad case I want to go out on it."

Another officer appeared, a major of infantry. He clutched Wally's arm.

"You can take a man out for me, can't you? He's my adjutant. He's got one through the lungs and I want to have him taken care of right away."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Wally, "but I've got to take this personnel to a town called Verdillot. They need a dressing station bad up there."

The doctor and the major looked at each other across the hood.

"Verdillot?" cried the doctor. "Why, the boche took Verdillot away from us at four o'clock this morning. Who sent you to Verdillot?" He again regarded the major. "Weren't they notified back there that Verdillot had been taken?"

"No," said the major, with just a slight trace of confusion, "we'll take it back again tonight. It isn't an important place anyway. If we send back word that a town is lost, higher authority always gets personal and says 'coward' many times and some of us get relieved of command and chased away to Blois, whereas if we say nothing but just take the town back again, all is well. What they don't know won't hurt them."

"Do you know where Verdillot is?" asked the doctor.

"Sure," replied Rouge. "I was there a couple of days ago. It's got red roofs you can see from the top of a hill."

"That's right," said the major. "it's the next town you strike going over the hill here." He pointed behind him, up the hill where the machine gun carts were going, up the hill where the road disappeared in the woods, the road that the ambulance had taken earlier in the afternoon when the men had crossed their own front lines.

"No!" said the three men on the ambulance.

"Yes!" said the two officers.

"So that's where all the American clothes and stuff came from that was in the street!" muttered the sergeant.

"Well, boys, this isn't getting baby any shoes," said the major. "Hop out of that ambulance. You can put up your dressing station here. This is the doctor that's been waiting for you."

FAR over the men's heads they suddenly heard a droning sound, a hum that rose and fell, a buzzing like that of a great, fat fly against a window pane. They looked up. The men that drove the machine gun carts and the gunners that followed them looked up. The passengers descended from the ambulance and looked up. High up there, pursuing its steady way, was a tiny white moth, a chip of silver on a sea of blue, glinting in the sun. Beneath this plane twinkled suddenly two blue lights—beneath and some distance below.

"Is that a boche or one of ours?" asked the doctor.

"We'll know in a few seconds," said the major.

He turned and, with a prodigious spring, a headlong dive, was gone from sight. The doctor did not wait to find the cellar door, but went in through a window, as a snake into its hole. The passengers from the ambulance ran madly here and there, some huddled under the ruined roofs of the houses, others leaped into the ditch, and one crawled beneath the ambulance. Rouge, Wally, and the sergeant sat transfixed. Down the road they could see the machine gun carts in wild confusion, the gunners running, and the drivers clubbing indignant mules into a run, or dragging helplessly at the heads of those that resisted.

All those men, pill rollers and gunners, had been fighting the boche for some time. They knew that a light fired from a plane meant action; they knew that somewhere the enemy already had guns trained on that road, and that when the plane dropped the flare that showed there was traffic on the road the enemy had nothing to do but fire the guns.

There was a moment of silence, of hush, of heaviness in the air such as that which precedes the downpour in a thunder storm. The men on the seat of the ambulance heard the rush of the coming rain and made immediate preparations to get under cover.

"Duck! Duck!" cried Wally.

He and the sergeant flung themselves down but Rouge, who had been riding on the outside and so was the first to jump from the car, tried to reach the shelter of a house. The shell pounced at him like a cat, and Wally could swear he heard the crash of it striking a garden wall against which Rouge had flung himself.

The shell burst, not with a clap of thunder, but a sputtering, splashing plop! as though it had been a sack full of water. Wally, from one eye, saw a cascade of smoking liquid run off the wall and spread into a steaming sheet of fog. A gas shell. The two men in the road went into their masks and Wally jumped for the klaxon of the ambulance.

"Aw! Aw! Aw!" it croaked.

Wally listened. Another klaxon echoed his faintly and he could hear the distant drumming of a spoon on a tin pan. The gas signal had been heard and repeated. Wally jumped back to the sergeant's side.

"Come on, we get Rouge!" he yelled.

The gas mask prevented the words from being heard, but Wally's gestures were enough. The sergeant put his ghastly mask close to Wally's ear.

"Look out, it's mustard!" cried the sergeant.

THEY found Rouge groping blindly in the road on hands and knees. The sergeant seized one arm and Wally the other and started to heave Rouge to his feet, but he fell again. Rrrrrip! The two men held each a sleeve. Again they leaped at Rouge and the sergeant, tearing at Rouge's collar, peeled blouse shirt and undershirt off him as one would the skin from an orange.

Wally got Rouge under the arms and the red-headed man was just getting to his feet when the sergeant swooped upon him again and with one rip, tore Rouge's breeches from him, leaving him clothed in steel helmet, gas mask and puttees. The sergeant then seized an arm and he and Wally rushed the gasping Rouge into the cellar from whence had emerged the doctor. The gas blanket was down over the door and the fact that the three entering received a bucket of water intended to wet down the blanket for the further hindrance of the passages of gas through it, did not help matters a bit. Once within shelter of the blanket, Wally tore off his gas mask.

"What the ——'s the matter with you?" he shrieked to the sergeant. "What's the idea in tearin' off all that poor kid's clothes?"

The sergeant had taken a bottle from his musette and was already scientifically dabbing at Rouge's eyes.

"I ain't much of a guy for bold bravery," said he, "but I know somethin' about gas burns. That stuff splashed all over him and the first thing to do is to get his clothes off. It's lucky he burned out most o' the thread in the seams. Now you and me wash our hands in this stuff where we took hold of him. It's gas lotion. I wish we had more, we'd give him a bath in it."

Rouge, restored to vigor and realization of his condition by the running of the cold gas lotion down his chest, waved his arms wildly and sought to break away from Wally's grasp.

"Lie low, now," said Wally, "we're just puttin' a little stuff on you. You got more mustard on you than a bar-room ham sandwich."

Rouge's language was magnificent. It even made some of the stretcher cases on the floor laugh. Wally and an orderly unwrapped Rouge's puttees and tore off the shreds of his breeches and removed his shoes. They gave him a blanket, and while the orderly wrote out a ticket, the sergeant put a dressing on Rouge's eyes.

"Keep that on," said the sergeant. "You may get outta this without a thing, but you let the doc have a look at those lamps when you get back. Meanwhile, keep that dressin' on."

A voice roared from the street.

"Come on, bring out your wounded! Get that ambulance to —— out of here!"

"Yes, yes," called the doctor from the back of the cellar, "if the shelling has stopped, load up the first four and drag!"

"Load 'em up," said Wally. "I'll take Rouge on the front seat."

"An' I'll go with you to hold him on," said the sergeant. "I've got to go back, anyway, and get some blankets for my guys. They left their packs up there in Coulonges."

The ambulance was unharmed. A greater number of leaves and a scattering of débris in the street were the only signs of the bombardment. Down the road the machine gun column was again in motion and evidently untouched, although some men seemed to be busy about something in the ditch, that might have been either an overturned cart, or a dead mule from which they were stripping the harness. Three men from the cellar and the wounded adjutant were loaded in the back of the ambulance and Rouge was assisted to the seat beside Wally.

"Cheer up," said the sergeant, "that wire stunt of yours was a great idea. If you hadn't burned the thread out of your clothes, we'd never been able to get 'em off in time and you'd been cooked like a lobster. That thing busted right over your head."

"Yes," agreed Wally. "Rouge, you sometimes show faint glimmers of sense. You said that town of Verdillot had red roofs and it sure was all broke out with 'em. It ain't your fault the boche captured it."

"An' think of how that mustard gas will drive all your coots away," added the sergeant.

Rouge, however, still remained silent.

"What the ——'s eatin' him?" muttered the sergeant. "Here we're doin' our best to cheer him up an' he makes as much noise as a clam. You'd think it was our fault he got burnt."

At this Rouge spoke.

"Wally," said he, "just as quick as we get home you scatter over and get me my wires outta that kitchen. If I have to go out to hospital I'll need 'em when I get back an' if I don't, I'll want 'em to police up my new uniform with. That's a good scheme, only a guy don't want to bear down too hard on the wire."

RACKTEEN

by Fiswoode Tarleton

Author of "Corn," "Sentence," etc.

MEN and women are struggling to be born again in Leeston's picnic grove. They are trying to leave their shells under the elm trees and float to heaven. Teapot torches hang from the tree limbs. Moanings come from the grove; reach up Main Street to the idlers and backsliders who stand under the porticoes of Leeston's store; moanings of folks who are agonized by the touch of earth. Bodies roll on the ground and heads lift and nod to the preacher's words.

"Ye must be born again."

The preacher raises his voice to a shout and steps out of the grove on to the road. He is calling up the road now, his voice carries to the porticoes. Folks fidget. Some step out of the shadows, hesitate, then answer the preacher's invitation.

Hallelujahs come from the grove. Folks clutch the sod with their fingers. A man is sitting up, swaying, and fixing a crown of twigs on his head. Bodies in the grove roll over and make room for the new converts coming. The preacher's words are like levers working to set everybody free, prying away their old shells. His shouts now reach down beyond the store buildings. Clear to Five Corners, where mountain men and women are climbing out of wagons and sliding off mules.

The grove is filling, and new converts are coming down the road from Five Corners. A few more leave the porticoes and follow. The road is dotted with lean, panting hounds.

A man steps out of the shadows across the road from the grove and breaks a bottle of whisky on a rock. Throwing his body down under the light of a burning wick in a teapot he testifies to salvation. He is shouting his sins above the preacher's words. Two more men step out of shadows and break their bottles on the road. Whisky fumes rise to rest on the air.

Somebody begins to sing. The preacher nods to a woman who sits down before an organ that rests against an elm tree. A man picks up a trumpet and stands by the organ.

"Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

A hundred voices sing it. More converts make their way to the grove. The chorus swells, loads the heavy, humid air under the elms. The grove is a caldron; bodies steam. The burning wicks in the teapots gash the night. Men and women clutch at the promise in the song, clutch at the trumpet's golden notes.

The preacher raises his hand again. Music and singing stops.

"Chariots are waiting and Gabriel is blowing his horn."

Singing comes again. Trumpet rises above the organ. The trumpet is pulling now; it is like a magnet and more folks are coming. Idlers under the porticoes have thinned to three or four. Lights go out in some of the stores.

A light is burning in the room over the bank. Two windows throw yellow squares of light on the street and sometimes a shadow moves across them. Three men are standing under the shadow of a tree on the other side of the street. They look up at the lighted windows and whisper, whisper about the young agnostic, Isor Rackteen.

Fallon the druggist steps out of his store across from the bank and sweeps the torn newspapers that are cluttering his walk into the street. He makes a pile of the papers and lights it. Torn bits of newspapers litter the street and sidewalks for its full length. Old man Steel sees from his doorway what the druggist is doing and makes a fire of the papers in front of the general store. The still, humid air almost smothers the flames. The piles burn slowly.

Smoke struggles to rise, lifts at last to the open windows over the bank and hangs on a level with the casements. A little of it enters the room, and Rackteen, who is setting type at a high bench, smells it. He walks over to the window and looks out. He stirs the layer of smoke hanging near the window with his hand and coughs two or three times. He sees old man Steel of the general store walking up and down the street, picking up pieces of newspapers and carrying them over to the fire, and Fallon sweeping the walk.

Rackteen laughs, a dry brittle laugh that carries across to the men standing under the tree. His laugh makes them shift their feet and stop whispering. Old man Steel looks up and goes back to his door under the portico. Fallon drags his broom indoors.

Drawing back into the room, Rackteen stands with his hands in his pockets. His mouth goes crooked as he looks at the copies of the Leeston *Argus* piled around the floor and on the printing press in the back end of the *Argus* office. Words rise as if to smite him from the first sheet of the *Argus*, Rackteen's words that have fired Leeston, that made Leeston folks send to Louisville for Evangelist Dorrit to save the town. He has printed views on evolution but hasn't he printed views on divine creation, too? And what has he told folks when they asked him what he believed? Hasn't he said he didn't know what to believe? Didn't he just say he was in doubt? Huh. Burning his *Argus* in the street. Canceling subscriptions.

He blows out the lamp on the table and returns to the window. Sits on the sill and looks out. The two fires are still smoldering. The three men have moved away from under the tree to a bench under the portico of the restaurant. Fallon the druggist puts out the light in his store, locks up and stands in his darkened doorway. The red end of his cigar glows like a hot rivet pinning him to his door.

Singing swells through the street again, trumpet notes riding atop the song. The end of Fallon's cigar grows redder. The glowing disc expands and moves up and down. Rackteen can tell that emotion is clutching Fallon now, that he is breathing faster. His cigar is almost blazing as he steps out of the doorway and stands on the board walk. He is mopping his brow now; quick brushing motions with his handkerchief are an outlet for his restless nerves. He is covering indecision and peering at the three men sitting in front of the restaurant. They are not moving or whispering, just sit. Fallon throws a glance up at the windows over the bank but Rackteen draws in his head.

Down by the grove the preacher holds up his hand for the music and singing to stop. He calls up the road to Fallon—

"Come, brother, come."

New waves of song drench Leeston and trumpet notes ride high, pulling Fallon to the edge of the board walk. He tries to take a step backward but his foot lifts again. Now he is on the road with both feet; just like he was jerked there. He is moving on a few steps, toward the grove. He throws away his cigar. The preacher is beckoning with one hand to Fallon and whipping up the trumpeter and singers with the other. The road ahead is lonely for Fallon. Rackteen can see. Five hundred feet of pounded clay mottled with hoof marks for Fallon to travel alone.

The singing is like a sea. Fallon is walking unsteadily into it now; he is swept on by the flood; he is plowing through billows of emotion to the grove. Fresh hallelujahs rise above the singing as Fallon throws himself under the elm trees. Rackteen can see him toss. Fallon is confessing, dropping his sins on to the sod.

"Huh."

Rackteen is thinking that the trumpet has the pull. Promises sound sweet. Singing is a flood. Brings in the sinners. But oh! the trumpet! Folks can't fight against it. Singing and preaching fail sometimes. But the trumpet is a warning. The trumpet is Gabriel calling—chariots waiting—passage to heaven. Rackteen feels the pull. He knows what sent Fallon the skeptic to the grove. The skeptic must be born again.

Rackteen's head is jerked around by the three men getting up from the bench in front of the restaurant and moving up the street away from the grove. He watches them pass under the dim street light at Five Corners and disappear down a mountain road. His lips smile a little.

"Huh. Callous. Like me."

Suddenly the music and the singing stop. Only moanings come up from the grove. The preacher throws an invitation up the street. But the street has been combed. The stores are all dark. Nobody under the porticoes on the other side of the street. No sounds from under the porticoes on Rackteen's side. No light in Rackteen's window, no light anywhere on the street except the one in front of the harness shop. The preacher must be calling for Rackteen. Somebody must have told him that Rackteen remains. Rackteen is listening intently for the preacher to call him by name but he doesn't. The preacher is drawing his likeness though; he is bringing an image to the converts in the grove. Clear-cut image of Satan in their midst.

All sound is swept away suddenly. The night is squeezed. Tired bodies rise. Some stagger. Some sit down again and sway. Shadows move under the teapot lights, mingle. Converts drift together into knots and start home, walking slowly, trying to pick up the threads of earth again. Hounds rise sluggishly and follow their own.

The preacher and two men lift the small organ into a wagon that is backed out from under a tree. Hill men hunt for their wagons and mules down the dark road. But in the grove a small group of men still stand together. Their heads are close. They look like they are whispering. Rackteen watches.

Converts are coming up the road now, from the grove. Those on foot walk slowly. Heads are heavy. Some are still praying. A few moan. Mules carrying two and three mountain people plod with hanging heads. Heavily loaded wagons groan. Passing the bank building, they all look up at the darkened windows, hanging their heavy eyes on them for an instant.

The teapot lights are suddenly snuffed out in the grove. A black curtain drops. The street settles. A few lights blink here and there about town; Leeston folks are lighting their way to bed.

Rackteen drums lightly with his fingers on the window-sill. He tries to pierce the darkened grove. There is a brooding that weights the air. Something is hatching down under the elm trees. In the grove the night is sitting like a strange bird—patient.

Now the grove shadow is breaking up. Rackteen counts five heads under big hats. Five men are coming up the road. The light from the street lamp in front of the drug-store is faint; Rackteen can't make out their faces. They are walking close together, turning their heads toward each other. Exchanging whispers.

Maybe the five men just lingered to pray among themselves in the darkened grove and are now going home. No, they couldn't have been praying. Too quiet.

They cut over to the board walk on Rackteen's side of the street and disappeared under a portico several doors down from the bank.

Stepping back into the dark *Argus* office, Rackteen sits on the edge of a table and waits. He is waiting for footfalls. Footfalls either passing the bank or coming upstairs. But footfalls don't come. The silence is thick. Rackteen goes back to the window and listens. Faint whispering floats up and a foot scrapes on the board walk under the portico.

A man is coming down the board walk on the other side of the street. Passing the drug-store, he glances over at the bank, at the five men standing together. He walks on faster and disappears into the black passageway between the drug-store and harness shop. Constable Bodie didn't spot trouble until he was right on it. The constable knew something was brewing and beat it. Rackteen laughs to himself in spite of the mystery of things.

Somebody is calling Rackteen's name

softly from under the portico. Calls three times.

Mystery nettles Rackteen. He doesn't like whispering. He doesn't know who the men are. They came up the street under cover of their hats first, then the porticoes. Rackteen throws his voice loudly.

"Who wants Rackteen?"

"Fallon," a voice answers softly.

Rackteen hears, but the secrecy is getting on his nerves. Why don't men speak out.

"Who is it?" He almost roars the question.

"Fallon."

It comes louder this time.

"Well, what do you want?"

Fallon says he wants to speak with Rackteen upstairs. His voice sounds different since he was converted.

Not knowing who the men are with Fallon, Rackteen hesitates. Too many unsettled feuds around Leeston to take chances. Hill men suddenly find out that a man is kin to old enemies, and trouble and fighting break out fresh. If Fallon will come alone that's different. He tells him that.

Fallon will come alone. He agrees to that quickly in a full voice. The other men will stop where they are. They have promised.

Mountain men are tricky sometimes. Can't always tell what they are going to do until they give their word. A mountain man's word and promise are worth something. Rackteen is from the high-country and knows.

Fallon may come up. Rackteen tells him in a softer voice, and steps back in the room to light the lamp.

The sound of Fallon's feet are already on the stairs. He is mumbling as he steps through the door opened half-way by Rackteen. Rackteen returns to the table and sits on it again, drumming with his fingers while Fallon stands blinking in the sudden light.

"The saving power of Jesus, Rackteen!"

"Yes. I know, Fallon." Rackteen speaks softly. He waits a while. Fallon's eyes are looking around the room.

"What's troubling you, Fallon?"

It is a minute before Fallon speaks. He is trying to make an answer. His lips move, but he doesn't speak. His eyes are at grips now with a copy of the *Argus* that lies on the table. His eyes seem to gather up the letters. He looks at the floor, then back at the newspaper on the table several times as if he were laying out Rackteen's language before him.

Rackteen senses the process going on in Fallon's mind and that it's hard for him to come to the point.

"You mean, Fallon, that the men downstairs don't like what's written there? That's why they're there?"

Fallon nods quickly. He is relieved of a load.

"Who's down there, Fallon?"

"Morgans and Clays."

"Huh!" Rackteen rises from his seat on the table. He steps over in front of Fallon. "And what are the Morgans and Clays going to do about it?"

"Gabe Morgan's the one mostly." Fallon knows he has to speak now.

"Why Gabe mostly?"

"Account of his sister Hattie." Fallon shakes his head.

A prayer comes faintly from his lips. His knees are sagging a little. He is tired.

Rackteen pulls up a chair for him and sits down on the table again. Rackteen has to go slower, the way everything else is going. He must give Fallon more time. The men under the portico outside are patient. The night is patient; it doesn't seem to be passing.

"What about Hattie, Fallon?" Rackteen speaks calmly but he is disturbed.

Which one of Rackteen's fleeting apprehensions will Fallon name?

"Hattie wouldn't come to the revival. She's backslid." Fallon mops the perspiration from his face. That single effort of speech is still making him sweat.

"What have I got to do with it, Fallon?"

Fallon points again to the copy of the *Argus*.

"Hattie believes that? She's lost her faith?" Fallon's words come out with a bleat.

Rising once more to his feet, Rackteen stands before Fallon. His voice is still soft.

"Listen, Fallon; you ought to know, but maybe you've forgotten that I never said I believed in anything. There are two sides to a question. There are two sides given in that paper. I have said nothing myself, except that I'm in doubt about some things. I've been just wondering. Maybe you'd call it wanting the truth. Maybe Hattie was just wondering. I didn't tell Hattie to stay away from the revival."

Fallon is looking around the ceiling. He doesn't seem to be taking in what Rackteen is saying. He seems to be searching in his mind for something to say.

Rackteen waits but his fingertips are pressing into his palms. His face is flushing.

Fallon has it now. He lays it out like a last card. With a snap.

"Hattie comes up here every afternoon after teachin' at the Leeston school. Gabe and them know it. All Leeston folks know it. Hill folks, too, some of 'em. The Morgans are Christians. Gabe is now— Praise the Lord! And Hattie's a backslider."

Stiffening his body and folding his arms, Rackteen takes a few steps back and forth. His cheeks are touched with color. When he stops before Fallon again and begins to talk he doesn't seem like Rackteen. He lapses into high-country talk.

"What's Gabe fixin' tuh do. Take it out o' my hide? Is Gabe expectin' tuh pound me into a Christian? Huh? Gabe Morgan an' I had it out once. Last election day. He didn't take anything out o' my hide then. But I took somethin' out o' his. How'd it come Gabe's nose is broken? And why wasn't he a fitten sight for folks to look at for a couple o' weeks? His folks calc'lated to come to Leeston the day we elected Floyd Jett sheriff and watch the Rackteens go a-scamperin' down the hill roads from their rocks. Instead, what happened? The Morgans and their kin did the scamperin'. When it comes to fists an' rocks or squirrel rifles I reckon I'm not a-worryin'. An' I'm not a-worryin' now with 'em all a-layin' fer me downstairs. I didn't leave my guts in Baltimore when I went there to school. Huh."

Fallon is muttering a prayer. He doesn't seem to be taking in what Rackteen is saying. Only half of Fallon seems to be present. He shakes his head and looks at Rackteen only as at a wayward man; a sinful man he'd like to convert, his eyes show no interest in the past. Rackteen's past seems to mean nothing. Rackteen's words dissolve into air before they can enter Fallon's ears.

Again Rackteen sits on the table, and tries to steady his tone.

"Gabe Morgan wants another fight. Is that it, Fallon?"

Fallon nods his head.

"Four of Gabe's kin with him. Huh. And my folks twelve miles away in the hills. Reckon I ain't a fool. Reckon you can tell 'em that. If Gabe wants to fight me why didn't he step up here alone? What'd he send you for?"

"Gabe and them thought maybe you were armed and they ain't." Gabe's brothers and the Clays won't mix in. They've given their word." Fallon nods his head quick.

The nod means that the Morgan word ought to be enough.

"And where does Gabe aim to lick me," Rackteen asks.

His voice is softer now. Doesn't pay to get excited; it makes Fallon confused.

Fallon shifts in his chair some.

"Can't fight in town. The sheriff'll stop it. He'll jail everybody."

Fallon's brows knit as if he is thinking over what he should say next. Rackteen's question isn't answered. Fallon's eyes are darting around the room now, from corner to corner as if the question were chasing him.

"Where does Gabe aim to fight, Fallon?"

"Where no one'll bother. Down by his place." Fallon sighs and sinks in his chair a little.

Rackteen scratches his head, kicks a newspaper around the floor, turns and laughs in Fallon's face.

"Down in enemy country." His words ride on jerks of laughter.

Rackteen is puzzled. Why are the Morgans set on pulling this fight off down at their place if they mean to play fair? Sheriff Floyd Jett isn't the only reason. Other points to the compass except east. More deserted south, down by the gap. Plenty of places all around Leeston. And Fallon—what's Fallon got in his mind. Fallon looks sinister now, waiting, waiting, his lips moving, but saying nothing and his eyes with expression Rackteen can't read. Slow mountain planning has been at work. Careful, sure planning. Fallon is a part of it. What is hatching, anyway?

What if Rackteen refuses to go and fight down in enemy country? He'd show common sense, that's all. But wouldn't the Morgans say he'd turned yellow? That they gave their word the fight would be fair? Wouldn't some folks believe he was yellow? The Morgans haven't left a loop-hole for Rackteen to crawl through. But why is he looking for a loop-hole? What's coming over him that he's looking for a way out? He almost made jelly out of Gabe Morgan once. Why can't he do it again?

The men down under the portico are getting restless. Rackteen can hear their feet moving, scraping on the board walk.

Fallon stirs. He rises from his chair and looks at Rackteen questioningly. But there is a mysterious, deep-lying piety back of that look, deep-seated fanatical plan that lies, patient but determined, in Fallon's head. It inflames Rackteen for an instant and he blows out the light and pushes Fallon ahead of him out the door. He follows him down the dark stairs. Fallon is giving thanks for something. What is he praising the Lord for now? For a fight? Rackteen has a notion to grab him and ask why he isn't working for peace instead of trouble. But Fallon has reached the last step. The men under the portico who have been leaning against the building straighten up. One of them peers around the door jamb, sees Rackteen is coming and nods for the other men to move on.

Gabe Morgan is taking the lead with his brother Dave. Walt and Ted Clay are right behind them. The Clay boys are carrying teapots; Walt is carrying a trumpet. Fallon walks by the side of Rackteen. Nobody speaks. The footfalls of six men sound lightly on the night as they walk toward Five Corners.

Avoiding the street light at Five Corners, Gabe and Dave Morgan turn to the left, crawl under a fence, the others following. All the men throw a glance down below Five Corners where a single light burns in the court-house and jail.

The men feel their way out of the pasture, under another fence on to a road. The road is black. It is like walking through a cavern. No stars overhead. No wind stirring. Somebody is mumbling ahead of Rackteen. He thinks he hears the Clay boys whispering. Rackteen can't tell where he is. Nothing is visible on either side of the road. He is stepping out but doesn't seem to be traveling.

A yellow flame suddenly flares ahead of Rackteen. Walt Clay has struck a match and is lighting the wick in a teapot. Everybody halts with Walt, then moves on again. The teapot flame is like the core of the night. Shadows of the six men step along the roadside, contort as they slip into gulleys or over rocks.

After a while, Gabe Morgan leaves the road and crawls under another fence. The others follow. A cow rises to her feet—big eyed—moves away from them down the pasture. A white mule turns his head slowly and looks at them. Dave Morgan lights the wicks in the teapots and places them in a circle around the pasture. Nobody speaks. Things move mechanically, silently, weirdly as in a dream.

Gabe Morgan is taking off his shirt now. Fallon and the two Clay boys stand back, away from the circle of flaming teapots. Dave Morgan steps back with them. Gabe tightens his belt.

While he takes off his coat and rolls up his sleeves Rackteen is thinking about Gabe Morgan's weakness. Rackteen's mind flits back to election day in Leeston when he fought Gabe right on Main street. He sees Sheriff Jett coming down the street again on the run to stop the fight, sees the crowd gathered around. He knew then that he had to settle the fight quick. Gabe Morgan's face was bleeding, all cut up by Rackteen's fists. He was giving ground from the first and when he saw the sheriff coming, tried to back into the crowd. The sheriff's coming was Gabe's excuse to save himself from a knockout. The yellow streak in him showed plain. But Rackteen had followed him up and laid him cold. Gabe was fooled by Rackteen's feints at his belly that day; he was sensitive about his belly being hit and guarded low, leaving his face exposed.

Now, in the pasture, Gabe is coming for Rackteen. There is a different look in his eyes. He is crowding Rackteen right off, his arms striking out like rams. Gabe's swings and blows are going over Rackteen's shoulder or head mostly, but Rackteen is backing. He finds an opening and Gabe's nose gushes; he finds another opening and closes Gabe's right eye. Gabe doesn't seem to notice the two blows. He doesn't wipe the blood away, doesn't pay any attention. He is cocking his head slightly, a wild strange look in his good eye. Feints at his belly don't bother him this time. He isn't covering himself at all but his arms shoot out and Rackteen is still retreating. Rackteen is waiting for another opening; he knows that his only chance is to close Gabe's other eye.

Rackteen in his retreating kicks over a teapot. He is being backed clear out of the ring. He finds a third opening at

Gabe's face, cuts his mouth, but Rackteen's right hand that delivered the blow is gashed; there isn't any feeling in it, fingers won't close tight. And Gabe's arms are still striking out like rams; even, steady strokes like a piston are passing Rackteen's ears with a rush of wind. Rackteen can't reach Gabe's good eye. He tries once more and the earth dips, rocks. He got in the path of Gabe's right.

He can't move out of the path; he is swaying on his feet. He backs up, but he is still in the path of Gabe's right. Now fire-dust is before Rackteen's eyes and the earth is upsetting, it is rising and supporting Rackteen's back; if it wasn't for that he wouldn't be able to stand up. He has got to reach Gabe's other eye but the earth won't let him draw his arm back. Gabe isn't guarding himself at all now. His arms are hanging down his side; he is praying. Why doesn't he wipe the blood away from his face. Is he smiling through the blood caked on his mouth? Where is his good eye looking? Not at Rackteen. Now it's a good time to close that eye. But it is so far away and the earth won't let Rackteen's arm draw back to swing. What is Dave Morgan hurrying down the pasture for? What are Fallon and the Clay boys praising the Lord for?

The earth is settling, now, and letting Rackteen down easily. Vaguely he can see Fallon, the Clay boys and Gabe Morgan standing close together just outside the circle of teapot lights. Gabe joins them now. Walt Clay is lifting the trumpet to his mouth.

"Throw out the life line."

The four men are singing it with all their might and the trumpet mounts the air. The light from the teapots glances from the trumpet and it glances from Gabe Morgan's face. Rackteen doesn't like to look at Gabe's face; it is so bloody that it glows. Why doesn't he wipe the blood away?

Something is coming across the pasture—white, wraithlike. It's Hattie Morgan. The sheen on her tresses catches the light now. She is barefoot and stepping fast toward the circle of teapots and Rackteen. Dave Morgan is sneaking around the lights and joining the four men. So Dave went to fetch Hattie to show her a manifestation of how Gabe fighting for God licked Rackteen.

Hattie never saw Rackteen licked before. He's got to get up. Got to. But he can't. The earth dips the second he lifts his head.

Hattie steps within the circle of teapots now and stands. She looks bewildered. She is brushing her forehead with both hands and glancing from Rackteen to the five men singing. Suddenly her eyes begin to widen. They flash at the men singing. They are throwing fire and she is walking over toward the singers. ——! She thinks all the men have jumped Rackteen. She musn't think that.

"Hat!"

Rackteen has to scream her name to pierce the singing. She turns but he has to scream again before she comes to him. She comes fast. She is lifting his head up now. His head spins but he doesn't mind.

Figures are crawling under the fence bordering the road and under the fence separating the pasture from the corn field. The trumpet is bringing hill folks from nearby cabins; the trumpet is jerking them out of their beds. The singing swells.

"Throw out the life line."

Hattie Morgan is clinging to Rackteen; she is holding on to him as to a spar. She is breathing fast; her breast is heaving and her heart thumping against his head. The tips of her fingers are pressing into Rackteen's flesh.

"Isor, honey!"

The Morgan and Clay boys and Fallon don't understand Hattie; they stand like they are stunned. Other hill folk gathered around and coming under the fences keep the singing going. The mouths of Gabe and Dave Morgan are not working.

Fallon jerks himself up in front of the singers and holds up his hand. The singing and trumpet are hushed. Fallon prays for Hattie Morgan. Folks in the pasture drop to the ground one by one. Some pray with Fallon. Some testify. Some toss and roll. Now Fallon is calling to Hattie to come forward and be saved.

Rackteen rises to his elbows. She helps him sit up and his head begins to clear. There is something he wants to say and she bends closer.

"Better go up, Hat. Better to have a God!"

Hattie holds to him tighter.

"Reckon I know it, honey."

Singing swells up again—trumpet notes—"Throw out the life line."

Gabe and Dave Morgan stand limp—staring—silent—waiting.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH

THE GOODLY COMPANY OF ADVENTURERS

by *Post Sargent* ~

Author of "Plato," "Hugo Grotius," etc.

". . . And then Pocahontas, finding her entreaties of no avail, darted to the place of execution, and before she could be prevented, got the head of the captive in her arms, and laying her own upon it, in this way arrested the stroke of the Indian executioner."

THESE words, copied verbatim from an old school text, sum up our working knowledge of a striking figure of our national history. They recall to our minds in vague silhouette the Captain John Smith of our childhood days—the hero of a thrilling episode.

But only an episode. An *entr'acte*, as it were, in the life drama of the founder of Virginia. A few pages torn from a romance of two continents, wherein the path of adventure leads from the Old World to the New, and back again. A cast of the die that men call "chance," or the workings of a conscious Providence, took this man from the Odysseus trail, for a moment, to break trail for a nation's destiny.

It was no mere novice that braved the perils and wilds of Virginia in 1607. Though young in years—being at the time only a youth of twenty-seven—John Smith was a veteran of life and hard experience. Since the age of fifteen he had played a man's part on a stage where stirring action and thrilling deeds were required of every actor. A drama? No; melodrama!—whose five acts seem as truly planned as those of Shakespeare or Shaw. With this exception, that catastrophe seems imminent in every scene.

Born of good English yeoman stock in Lancashire, in 1580, John Smith absorbed just enough schooling to give him a distaste for books. The eager activity of his mind and blood betrayed itself at this early period. According to his own statement, he was "set," at the age of thirteen, "upon brave adventures." He had already sold his few books and his school-bag and was preparing secretly to steal away to sea, when his father's death put a temporary stop to the venture. But not for long. His mother had died years before, and the boy waited only to collect the little patrimony. His guardians, however, loath to part with the trust fund, proved faithless to their oath as trustees. They apprenticed the lad to a merchant and handed him ten shillings—as a gift.

But John Smith was not cut out for a merchant's life. He promptly jumped the counter and made his way to France. Here he made many friends and might have gone to Scotland under powerful patronage, had not the call to adventure proved stronger than the desire for wealth. His mind was too eager for the novel, too impatient of the staid, too wild, too erratic, to remain long fixed, at this period of his life, on any one object.

The new beckoned; his faculties were being trained; his impulses were being unconsciously directed and disciplined. From this knowledge and discipline came the vigilance, far-sightedness, promptness of decision and tremendous activity that were to make him a leader of men.

Perhaps the lad took part in the civil wars of Catholics and Protestants, terminating in the assassination of Henry IV in 1610. While he does not himself tell us so in his narrative, there is every reason to believe that he learned under French leaders at this time the rudiments of war, and from some Frenchman acquired the mastery of the sword.

Then four years in the Low Countries, under a Captain Joseph Duxbury, fighting against the Spaniards in the great conflict that finally secured to the Netherlands their independence. He tells us with equal pride and modesty that he had mastered all in the martial schools of France and the Netherlands that "his tender years could attain unto."

Wearied of camp life in Flanders, Smith suddenly bethought himself of the years-old invitation to visit Scotland. He embarked for Leith, but the vessel was wrecked and he narrowly escaped drowning. A severe illness followed and the youth "lay in as much danger as sickness could endure."

It had been his intention to seek preferment at the court of Scotland, offering in payment his military experience and his skill with the sword. Perhaps it was the knowledge he gained at first hand of James the First that turned him from his purpose. Certainly John Smith had neither the tastes nor the temperament of the successful courtier, and the thought of fawning upon such a monarch must have been repugnant to him. To one who had lived so rapidly and had already seen so much of the world, there could have been no mode of life so well calculated to pall upon his tastes as the tame and humdrum existence and the monotonous quiet of a country town.

His mind was naturally fretted by inactivity, and the very presence of a crowd—we have his own words for it—and the sight of a society that neither toiled nor produced, disgusted a temper which, for so long, had enjoyed the excitements of a camp, the variety and animation of a great city, the dangers of the sea and the thousand stimulating sights and influences of a strange land.

For a time he fled from society to the solitude of the forests. He adopted the life of a hermit.

"In woodie pasture," to quote from his narrative, "invironned with many hundred acres of other woods," the youth shut himself away from other men. "Here, by a faire brooke, I built myself a pavillion of boughs, where onely in my clothes I lay."

This strange proceeding, in a lad of nineteen, is indicative of the romantic tendencies of his character—of an eager, enthusiastic nature that always yearns for the wild, the strange and the extravagant—avoiding the beaten path, and striving after an expression of individuality in fields from which the ordinary person shrinks in dismay. Here is the germ of that adventurous mood that led John Smith to Asia; and across the Atlantic to the uncharted forests of Virginia.

Two books he had in his solitude, in his "pavillion of boughs." His "studie" was Machiavelli's "Arte of Warre" and the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius. What more perfect library for a leader of men?

But his eccentric life soon made him notorious among the gentlemen and peasants of Scotland. The fame of the young hermit spread. Among those who came to visit him was an Italian gentleman, who aroused him from his contemplative life by tales of stirring happenings in the outside world. And so he once more sought action in the Low Countries, and from there set his face towards the Orient.

"Thus," runs our hero's narrative, "when France and the Netherlands had taught him to ride a horse, and to use his armes, with such rudiments of warre as his tender yeeres in those martial schooles could attaine unto, he was desirous to see more of the world, and to try his fortune against the *Turkes*, both lamenting and repenting to have seene so many Christians slaughter one another."

Four Frenchmen were his first companions on the first leg of his further journeys. They proved to be rogues. Under guise of friendship they stripped him of all his possessions, even to his fine clothes and sword. New friends took their place who helped him to money and letters of recommendation.

He resumed his wanderings, traveling from province to province of France and from port to port.

Once, while roving through Brittany, he came upon one of the treacherous Frenchmen who had robbed him. It was in a lonely woods. No flight was possible for the robber. No words were spoken.

"My piercing injuries had small patience," wrote John Smith.

Swords were instantly drawn. Young John Smith had rather an easy victory, he tells us without boasting. Beyond that, no redress, except the satisfaction of severely wounding one who had caused him great misery and anxiety in a foreign land.

Pursuing his way, he arrived at Marseilles where he took ship for Italy. On this short voyage he was destined to experience another of those trials that tested his fitness for great achievements. The vessel on which he sailed was crowded with pilgrims on their way to Rome. A violent storm arose. It was discovered that John Smith was the only "heretic" on board. He was accused of being a Jonah.

THE ship was driven to seek harbor near Nice. More accusations were hurled at the young adventurer by the superstitious pilgrims. He replied in kind.

"They wildly railed on his dreade sovraigne, Queen Elizabeth, hourly cursing him not only for a ***Hugonoit,*** but his nation they swore were all pyrats." They concluded "that they never should have faire weather so long as hee was aboard them; their disputations grew to that passion that at length they cast him into the sea." We are assured, however, that John Smith roundly cudgeled many of them before he was forced overboard.

Fortunately he was an expert swimmer and the shore was not far distant. He made his way to a little uninhabited island, from which he was rescued the next day by a French vessel. Captain La Roche took a strong fancy to the young Englishman and invited him to make the full voyage to Alexandria, in Egypt. A hint was thrown out that some profit might be looked for, since the ship had letters of marque that permitted it to prey lawfully on foreign shipping. And so John Smith sailed on, "keeping their course by *Cypres* and the coast of Asia, sayling by Rhodes, the *Archipellagans,* Candia and the coast of *Grecia* and the isle of *Zeffalonia.*"

A Venetian argosy was captured after a desperate fight. John Smith's share of the booty more than recompensed him for what he had lost to the four French robbers. The cargo of the Venetian ship, he tells us, consisting of "silkes, velvets, cloth of gold and tissue, pyastres, chicqueens and sultanies which is gold, was wonderful." Five hundred "chicqueens" (sequins) and a small box of jewels fell to him as spoil, to further him upon his journey.

Leaving Captain La Roche, Smith soon made his way to Rome, where it was his "chance to see Pope Clement the Eighth, with many cardinals, creepe up the holy stayres." Next to Naples and other great cities, in order "to satisfie his eye with faire cities and the kingdome's nobilitie."

In the midst of his wanderings, he suddenly awoke to the original purpose for which he had sailed from France—that of joining the armies of Rodolph of Germany, then at war with the Turks, under the third Mahomet. By way of Venice, Albania and Dalmatia, he came at last to Gratz in Styria, where Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria and later Emperor of Germany, had his residence. Thence on to Vienna, having now attached himself to the staff of Lord Ebersbaught, a colonel of cavalry.

A cruel war had long been raging between Germany and the Turks. The year 1601, at the close of which Smith makes his appearance in the new field, had been distinguished by many terrible battles, the Turks being for the most part victorious. Hungary had been ravaged by the Turkish armies and some of the strongest fortresses taken. Flushed with their successes, the Turks pushed forward and laid siege to Olympach. Lord Ebersbaught was in command of the defense. Seven miles from Olympach John Smith served with a relief force. Between this force and the besieged town lay the beleaguering Turkish army, twenty thousand strong; too numerous for garrison or relief troops to attack except in concert. But how was John Smith's commander to communicate his plans for rescue to Lord Ebersbaught?

Was it young Smith's "studie of Machiavelli's 'Arte of Warre'" during his hermit days? Was it something he had learned in his boyhood campaigns in the Netherlands? Or was it native wit and a genius for military strategy? At any rate, John Smith held the answer to the life-and-death puzzle. Months before he had taught to Colonel Eversbaught a secret telegraph system and code for use in just such an emergency. But would the latter heed the signals; or seeing them, be able to decode their meaning?

That night John Smith lighted three fires equidistant from each other on a high mountain. To his joy three torches appeared, after a time, upon the walls of Olympach. Lord Ebersbaught had not forgotten the lesson.

Then across the space of seven miles flashed the message to the besieged:

"On — Thursday — at — night — I — will — charge — on — the — east — at — the — alarm — sally — you."

And the reply came promptly—

"I —will!"

Simultaneous sally and attack were successful. By a further ruse suggested by John Smith, ten thousand Turks were kept by their commanders from the real battle, in order to repel an imaginary foe. More than a third of the other ten thousand were killed in battle, or drowned in the river near the battle-field. Alarmed and despairing of success, the Turks raised the siege.

Rewards and honors were heaped upon the lad of twenty-one, whose ingenuity and skill had brought success out of seeming disaster. He was made captain of a company of two hundred and fifty horse.

A long truce! Then preparations for war on a greater scale. In the campaign that followed, Smith was employed in a manner that gave him excellent training for his future career among the Indians of Virginia. The army in which he served as officer, carried war against the Turks into the savage mountains of Transylvania, into the very strongholds of the wildest natives of the Balkans. And there, in the rocky mountains of Zarham, the Christians laid siege to the walled town of Regall.

The curtain rises upon a new, strange act of our drama. The actors are indeed in the costume of the seventeenth century, odd-appearing no doubt to eyes of the present day, but modern withal, when judged by the changing standards of the teeming centuries. But it is the stage-setting, the actors' lines, the plot, the sheer impossibility of the dramatic action that make the spectator doubt the evidence of his eyes. Stage and audience are transported back across the gulf of five hundred years, to the age of golden chivalry; to Richard the Lion-Hearted and Ivanhoe. Or still farther back, to the hosts of Agamemnon before the walls of ancient Troy.

As amphitheatre, the rugged mountains of Zarham, gashed by wild passes and defiles. The beetling walls of Regall, crowded with ferocious faces of Turkish mountaineers and Tatar banditti. Beneath the walls, proceeding to the investment of the fortress with slow caution and thoroughness, the Christian army. Wild cries and taunts from the besieged; silence and grim purpose on the part of the besiegers.

The Turkish defenders, in contempt of their crafty and slow-moving opponents, called for a Christian warrior to meet their own champion in the lists—a duel to the death. Their jeers and insolence aroused the fierce temper of the Christian army. The challenge of the Lord Turbishaw—leader of the Turks—was accepted after the fashion of the times of chivalry. Such was the competition among the captains of the Austrian army, that lots were drawn for the honor of representing Europe against the Turk. The ballot on which John Smith's name was written was the first to be drawn, and he was declared champion.

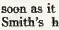
As in ancient times a truce was declared between the two armies. On the day appointed for the combat, the Christian army was drawn up in martial array, with banners waving, with trumpets sounding—all amid the great excitement of nineteen thousand soldiers and officers. On the ramparts of the town, the Turks made equal display.

According to the custom, the Turkish challenger first made his appearance on the field. A noise of "howboys" announced his entrance. He was mounted upon a magnificient horse and clad in a suit of splendid armor. The English lad of twenty-two was so little impressed by the fearful aspect of his adversary that he took note of his accoutrements:

"On his shoulders were fixed a paire of great wings, compacted of eagle's feathers, within a ridge of silver, richly garnished with gold and precious stones." Three Janissaries attended the Turk; one going before to bear his lance; two others walking beside the horse whose bridle they held.

John Smith was no carpet knight. He had donned the only suit of armor he possessed, battered and dented in many campaigns. He wasted little time in taking the place assigned to him. The customary salute, the trumpet signal, the rush and shock of steed against steed, the clash of arms! But the combat was over almost as soon as it had begun. So well trained was Smith's horse, so true and unerring the rider's eye and arm, that his lance pierced the Turk's beaver and went through to his brain. Captain Smith leaped from his horse. Finding his opponent dead, he cut off his head and carried it back to the Christian camp.

Imagine the exultation in the ranks of the Christians, and the grief among the Turks. But the rage of the latter was greater than their grief. Turbishaw, their great warrior, was dead, but other champions remained to avenge him.



AND so the walls of Regall were again covered with spectators. Again the flourish of hautboys announced the entrance of the champions of the respective armies. Grualgo, the bosom friend of Turbishaw, met the savage attack of Smith in the center of the arena. The lances of both flew to pieces at the shock. The Turk was almost unhorsed, while the English lad remained firm in the saddle. Seizing their pistols, they emptied them at each other. Smith was slightly wounded; the Turk escaped unhurt. At the second discharge the Turk's left arm was shattered and his horse became unmanageable. He was thrown to the ground.

Since the rules of the combat were *à outrance*—to the death, without quarter—Smith jumped from his horse and cut off the wounded man's head. Head, horse and armor became the trophies of the conqueror. The body, he is careful to tell us, was returned, in its rich clothing, to the dead man's friends.

Now, since none of the Turks cared to try lance or sword with the Christian champion, and since the siege dragged on monotonously, Smith decided to challenge in his own name, simply "to delude time," as he expressed it. Accordingly defiance was sent to the whole Turkish garrison to send forth their best remaining man to fight for the honor of the Turkish army. The prize would be the heads of the two defeated champions, together with his own.

It became a point of honor with the defenders of Regall to accept the challenge. A certain Bonny Mulgro—for so Smith spells the name—was designated to represent the Turks. Since the choice of weapons lay with the challenged, Mulgro declined to meet Smith with the lance. Instead, he chose pistol, battle-ax and sword. The pistols being discharged without damage to either combatant, both fell to work with battle-ax, with which weapon Mulgro was uncommonly proficient. For a time the issue of the fight was doubtful. Then by a dexterous stroke the Turk deprived the Englishman of his weapon. The latter's death seemed certain to all—except to Smith. By the skilful management of his steed he escaped for several minutes the blows of his enemy. Then, with sword in hand, spurring his horse upon that of Bonny Mulgro, he crowded the latter out of position. Shortening his own weapon, he drove it through the body of the Turk. who fell lifeless to the ground.

A triumphal procession was held in the Christian camp in honor of their champion. Smith was conducted to the tent of the commanding general, where he was embraced and presented with costly gifts. Though destined always to be known as Captain John Smith, he was made a Major in his regiment.

The fortress of Regall captured, Smith moved on to another theater of war. But fortune changed. At a pass in the mountains of Transylvania, where the Christians were overwhelmed by a force of Crim Tatars, Smith was left wounded on the field of battle. Recovered from his wounds, he was sold into slavery in Constantinople. Ill-treated by a Turk named Timor, he made his escape. Note Smith's words in self-vindication, as he speaks of himself, as always, in the third person:

"The pasha, as he oft used to visit his granges, visited him, and took occasion so to beat, spurn, and revile him, that forgetting all reason Smith beat out the Timor's brains with his threshing bat, and, seeing his estate could be no worse than it was, clothed himself in the Timor's clothes, hid his body under the straw, filled his knapsack with corn, shut the doors, mounted his horse, and ran into the desert at all adventure."

Thence, traveling in haste, he reached a Russian outpost, after incredible hardships. Through Russia, Hungary and Austria he roamed, reaching Leipzig in Germany in December, 1603. And then, some time later, to England!

The curtain falls and rises once more. The scene has changed miraculously. Instead of wild passes in the mountains of the Balkans, in place of fierce Turks and Tatars, we see the placid beauty of the forests of Virginia; we view, at the side of Captain John Smith, the copper-skinned savages who move silently along their age-old trails to peer cautiously at the tiny settlement of Jamestown, the outpost of a new civilization that fills them first with awe—then fury.

But this would be the story of America, an act of our drama that needs but short rehearsal here.

For while John Smith was fighting Europe's fight against the Moslem world, sighing for new perils, adventures and "hair-breadth 'scapes, with moving accidents by flood and field," England's march of empire had turned westward. Smith's luck held. He returned to England in time to be a leader in the van of those who followed closely on the heels of Sir Walter Raleigh.

And so the charter of 1606 from King James to the London Company. And so one hundred and five male emigrants to Virginia, with pickaxes and special orders to seek out mines of gold for the royal treasury.* Thus, in 1607, the colony of Jamestown, fed on false desires and ephemeral ambitions, nurtured in the jealousy and strife of its leaders. One man alone—the adventurer—rose superior to intrigue, self-interest, despair and sloth. Almost single-handed he fought and conquered men's evil natures and nature's evils—the whining enmity of his companions and the dangers from famine, plague and savages.

When, from sheer indolence and improvidence, his fellows refused to labor, Captain John Smith, now governor of the colony, brought lasting fame to the scriptural injunction that those "who would not work should not eat." They worked—and respected—and hated!

And now—

". . . And then Pocahontas, finding her entreaties of no avail, darted to the place of execution, and before she could be prevented, got the head of the captive in her arms. . . . "

Only a little Indian maiden of some twelve or thirteen years, daughter of the great sachem Powhatan, whose warriors had captured Smith on one of his explorations into the wilds of Virginia! Weeks of extreme peril for the captive, the crucial moment of death, the miraculous intervention of Pocahontas—then freedom and the powerful friendship of Powhatan!

Romance would fain join with adventure in a triple pact with Cupid, to the end that John Smith and Pocahontas should love, and wed and live happily thereafter. But history decrees otherwise. The Indian girl married a certain John Rolfe, and died in England, after a taste of that white civilization that so much suited her palate.

Alas! The ancient school-book said no word of the Captain John Smith who was matured and disciplined in the hardest school of Europe: the turbulent Balkans, the bloody battle-fields of Hungary, the fluid frontiers of Asia Minor.

Nor does the old text even suggest the closing acts of our drama, "Captain John Smith—Adventurer and Man of Destiny." Acts that continue in the hectic style of melodrama and close in—tragedy. For the deepest tragedy that can come to a man of brilliant achievement is to sow the seeds of approval and reap opprobrium; to hear his successes named failures. Jealousy and treachery were the reward in 1609 of John Smith's efficiency and loyalty to a principle.

As he returned to Jamestown from an expedition, a bag of gunpowder exploded as he slept beside it in a boat. His flesh was shockingly torn and burned. With clothing on fire, he jumped overboard to quench the flames and was with difficulty rescued from drowning.

A number of disaffected colonists, about to be put on trial for disobedience, chose this moment to plan their leader's murder as he lay helpless in his bed. The wretch chosen to commit the murder lost heart at the last moment. Standing with pistol pointed at the sick man, he had not the courage to fire, but suddenly turned and fled. Foiled in this plot, the traitors conspired to seize the government of the colony, in order to escape punishment for their previous misdeeds.

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*A whole shipload of gleaming yellow earth sent back to London, and which turned out to be only "fool's gold," wrecked the temper of King Jamie, and almost wrecked the infant colony.

Sick and wounded, weary of the perpetual struggle against the violence and malice of such enemies, Smith returned to England in the autumn of 1609, harassed and persecuted by the petty officials of the home government and the group of traitorous colonists. He never again saw Virginia.

Once more back in England, after a narrow escape from death by drowning, John Smith still retained the elastic spirit of youth and his visions of further adventurings. He did visit New England and busied himself with authorship. To this period we owe to Captain John Smith, author and poet, such human documents as the "General Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles, with the names of the Adventurers, Planters and Governors, from their first beginning, An. 1584, to the present, 1626, &c."

And again in 1630, "The true Travels, Adventures and Observations of Captain John Smith in Europe, Asia, Affrica and America, from 1593 to 1629."

Unsuccessful in his efforts to arouse English enthusiasm for his vast colonization schemes, worn out physically by a life of hardships, John Smith died in 1631, in his fifty-second year, while planning a "History of the Sea."

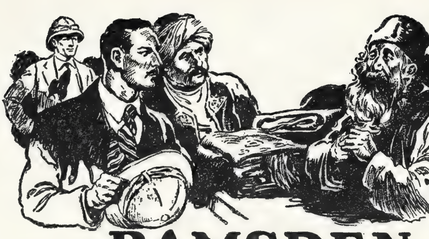
Two of the sixty survivors of the famous "starving time" in the early history of Jamestown wrote, in 1609, what might well serve as the epitaph of Captain Smith, or any other great seeker of adventure.

"What shall I say? but thus we lost him that in all his proceedings made justice his first guide and experience his second; ever hating baseness, sloth, pride, and indignity more than any dangers; that never allowed more for himself than his soldiers with him; that upon no danger would send them where he would not lead them himself; that would never see us want what he either had, or could by any means get us; that would rather want than borrow, or starve than not pay; that loved actions more than words, and hated falsehood and cozenage more than death; whose adventures were our lives, and whose loss our deaths."

And Captain John Smith the poet? A modest one, with the scant twenty-four lines of the "Sea-Marke." A warning to mariners—their ships, their lives. Behind this admonition, advice to those adventuring for profit oı gratitude.

"Aloofe, aloofe, and come no neare,
The dangers doe appeare,
Which, if my ruine had not beene,
You had not seene;
I only lie upon this shelfe
To be a marke to all
Which on the same may fall
That none may perish but myself."

Con the roster of the world's great, achieving adventurers and note me those whose deeds are not lighthouse beacons, to lure and direct the brave to like exploits; whose skeletons do not lie moldering above some hidden reef of life—human greed, ingratitude, treachery and hate.



RAMSDEN

A FIVE-PART STORY - PART I BY Talbot Mundy

Author of "The Dancing Girl of Gades," "Tros of Samothrace," etc.

CHAPTER I

AN ALMOST WORDLESS CONFERENCE PRODUCES AN ABRUPT DECISION.

I FIND myself wondering why I should go to this trouble to write what few men will believe. Why do we try to leave records behind us? Why not wait until we meet old friends again on the bank beyond the river, when we can compare notes and laugh at the amateur drama we all combined to spoil with such enthusiasm? Frankly, I don't know. The impulse is to set down an account of this adventure; and that in spite of the uncertainty that it will ever reach the United States.

I am writing in a draughty cave, in a temperature that numbs fingers, freezes ink at intervals and makes concentration on the task extremely difficult to a man unused to writing anything but field reports on mines and ordinary business letters. The sheets of this manuscript are fluttering under the stones I have to use as paper-weights; my feet are nearly frozen, in a fur bag filled with yak-dung; I am filthy from weeks without washing, and extremely sore from bruises, as well as suffering from what I think is indigestion, due to bad food.

Moreover, "Jimgrim" is not here. He has a clearer brain than mine, a better memory and clearer judgment of essentials. I must tell the story to the best of my own recollection—without the advantage of comparing notes with him.

JIMGRIM—born James Schuyler Grim, but known as Jimgrim all over the Near East, Arabia, parts of Africa, and from Dera Ismail Khan to Sikkim—has served in the Intelligence Departments of at least five nations, always reserving United States citizenship. He speaks a dozen languages so fluently that he can pass himself off as a native; and since he was old enough to build a fire and skin a rabbit, the very midst of danger has been his goal: he appears to love danger as most folk crave safety and comfort. When he is what other men would reckon safe, the sheer discomfort of it bores him.

He is the best friend a man could have, the least talkative, the most considerate; and he seems to have no personal ambition—which, I suppose, is why the world rewarded him with colonelcies that he did not seek and opportunities for self-advancement that he never used. Jimgrim could have had anything he cared to ask for in the way of an administrative post; and, queerly enough, the one thing that he always wanted was denied him. From his youth he wished to be an actor. That he is one of exceeding merit, is beyond dispute; but, except for occasional amateur performances behind the lines of armies, he has never set foot on the stage.

He looks as if he were half-Cherokee, although I believe there is only a trace of red man in his ancestry. He has a smile that begins faintly at the corners of his eyes, there hesitates as if to make sure none will be offended by it, and then spreads until his whole face lights with humor, making you realize that he has understood your weakness and compared it with his own. If you have any self-respect at all you can't pick quarrels with a man who takes that view of life; the more he laughs at you, the more you warm toward him, since he is equally laughing at himself.

Grim and I were in Darjiling with our backs against the porch of a hotel, from which the whole range of the Himalayas could be seen, on one of those rare days of autumn when there was neither rain nor mist. The peak of Kanchenjunga stood up sharp and glittering against a turquoise sky. In our ears was the roar of the Runjeet River. In the distance, almost straight in front of us and looking, in that clear air, hardly fifty miles away, was the outline of the frontier of Tibet.

We had returned, about a week before, from Assam, where I had gone to report on some oil indications. Grim, who made the trip with me, had amused himself by making Nepalis, Lepchas, Sikkimese and Bhutanis believe he was a Tibetan in disguise; and on the other hand, when he had met some old Tibetan pilgrims returning from India toward the Tse-tang pass, he had convinced them that he was born in Sikkim. I have frequently seen him play the same game in Arab countries, using the dialect of one tribe to disguise from another such discrepancies of accent as might otherwise betray him.

We were not, I remember, talking. Grim is a man with whom you can sit for hours on end, saying nothing, enjoying his company. Our eyes were on that splendid panorama, neither of us at the moment guessing that our destiny would lead us across it and up to the roof of the world—but not back again. We can not go back now to the friends we knew and the world we have left behind; but, being at a loose end, we had been discussing, that morning, whether or not we should visit some friends in California.

It was Grim who spoke first, rolling a cigaret and setting his feet on the veranda rail, framing Kanchenjunga between them as if he were squinting at the mountain through a V sight.

"What next?" he asked.

I did not know. I was sick of business. Grim cares nothing about money, and I had made all I will ever need; yet we were neither of us in the least disposed to loaf. Neither he nor I have any relatives who matter, we are both unmarried, we agree in loathing politics, and we are both verging on middle-age—at that period of life, that is to say, when a man's real usefulness ought to begin. If a man hasn't acquired judgment and stability at forty-nine, he had better grow fat and keep out of the way.

I knew Grim had been in Tibet. He was with Younghusband's expedition, when he got himself into disfavor by ignoring the military problems he was there ostensibly to help clear up, and studying exclusively those apparently insignificant odds and ends that, he maintains, are "the guts of things." I did not even guess that he was thinking about Tibet while he stared between his feet at Kanchenjunga.

Before I could answer him there came and sat beside us a small, smart Englishman by the name of Dudley Tyne—not a man we knew well, nor knew very much about except that he was popular, reputed to be dangerous, and in some vague way connected with the secretariat. He knew how to be tactfully agreeable, but the tact was almost overdone, with the result that one fell on guard against him, though without any definite sense of dislike. We invited him to drink, and for five or six minutes he talked about the mountain range that filled the whole horizon, naming the prominent peaks. He seemed to know the ranges rather intimately and his conversation was intelligent.

He used considerable subtlety in reaching his objective, which was information about Elmer Rait, an American of Columbus, Ohio, with whom I went to school, and with whom I was for several years in partnership until I decided it was not worth while to try to continue to get along with him. The things a man says don't matter much; it is the way he feels toward yourself and others that makes him friend or not. Elmer Rait and I talked the same language, but thought from entirely opposed angles, and I came at last to the conclusion that he was rotten at the core, although he never did anything likely to get him into prison.

However, that was personal opinion. It was no excuse for telling tales against Rait, so I answered Mr. Tyne extremely guardedly, obliging him to disclose his reasons for so many questions.

"Rait is in Tibet," he told me at last. "Our government has signed a treaty with Tibet. We recognize their right to keep strangers out of their country, and we've agreed to close the frontier. Rait has slipped through, which makes it awkward."

Grim was listening, his eyes still fixed on Kanchenjunga. I noticed that he took his feet down off the rail, but he threw away his cigaret and rolled another as if the conversation didn't interest him much.

"In what way are Rait's movements supposed to concern me?" I asked, expecting to be told that I would have to sign a promise not to try to cross the frontier—that being the Indian Government's usual method with individuals whose exact intentions are unknown. All governments lock stable doors immediately after a horse has bolted.

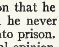
I would have signed such a promise without question, but fortunately it had no more entered the heads of Anglo-Indian officials than it had mine that I might venture across the border.

"I was told you quarreled with Rait some years ago. I thought you might not object to giving us information," Tyne suggested.

I told him the exact truth; that I had none sufficiently recent to be of any use. It was seven years since I had seen or heard from Rait.

"He seems to know your whereabouts," Tyne answered. "Our information is that he wrote to you from Lhassa, sending the letter by hand to someone in Darjiling. Would you mind letting me see that letter?"

I told him I had not received it. His manners were irreproachable and he left us before long, contriving the impression that he believed every word I had said. As if to wipe away the least trace of official unpleasantness he begged us to join him at dinner that night at the club; and because we wished to show that we had not resented his questioning, Grim and I accepted.



WHILE we were at dinner with him both our rooms in the hotel were searched and every single document in our possession was gone through thoroughly. To make the raid look plausible a watch-and-chain, a little money and some odds and ends of jewelry were stolen—all of which the police recovered for us next day with an alacrity and lack of fuss that was beyond all praise, but left no doubt as to who had searched our papers.

As we surveyed our upset luggage Grim looked at me and asked in the casual voice with which he hides emotion:

"Do you suppose Rait went for his health. What about that? Like to look for him?"

I nodded. If memory serves, that was all the conferring we did as to whether or not we should follow Rait over the border. The very fact that his object in going was a mystery was enough to make us take the trail.

Tyne had asked us again and again to suggest to him who might be the individual to whom Rait would direct a letter for delivery to me. We had not even tried to imagine who it might be. But now, as we looked at our clothes scattered over the floor, and realized that we had been invited out to dinner that the spies might search our rooms without risk of disturbance, we did some thinking—thought of the same man simultaneously, and both spoke at once—

"Chullunder Ghose!"

There was nobody else in Darjiling whom Rait would dare to trust, and who, at the same time, was known to Rait to have been more or less in my confidence. True, Grim and I had been in Darjiling for several days since our return from Assam, and Chullunder Ghose had neither presented himself nor sent a messenger; but the fat babu, supposing it was he who had received Rait's letter, would be the last person on earth to betray its whereabouts to the authorities by any sort of hasty movement.

Said Grim:

"If the babu has that letter, he has read it. Probably he hopes to keep its contents to himself."

Nevertheless, we made no move until the day following, after the police had brought back our stolen trinkets. We did not even discuss the subject, but both pondered it, and both of us reached the same conclusion as to how best to avoid the incessant watchfulness of the ubiquitous Indian spies.

"Hancock!"

It was Grim who voiced the suggestion uppermost in both our minds. Will Hancock is a reverend, possessed by weird ideas of heaven and hell and an entirely hospitable nature. He wears blue spectacles and runs a mission, away across the Runjeet River, thirty miles beyond Darjiling, breeding sturdy little ponies on the side, and writing commentaries on the Buddhist scriptures in his spare time. He has proved, to his own satisfaction, that all the Pali manuscripts are forgeries; that the original Garden of Eden was in Ceylon; that the Afghans and Afridis are the ten lost tribes of Israel; that Alexander never crossed the Indus; and that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. He is a mild man in all except argument, an honest man in everything except debate, a genial, good-natured fellow until you mention any of the subjects and side issues he has made his own. Behind his graying brown beard and heavily smoked glasses there is so obviously nothing except benevolence and bookish brains that not even the Intelligence Department keeps an eye on him.

"We can make it by sunset," said I.

But we did not. It was nearly midnight when we rode up to the mission and woke Will Hancock from a just man's sleep by making a noise like a cat and dog fight, which he came out in pyjamas to prevent. It took him about five minutes to unlock the iron gate under the archway, which would keep out almost anything except artillery—whereas the wall is hardly high enough to keep the knee-high convert-children in—but we rode in at last and were welcome, though we kept him out of bed beside a fragrant log-fire in the mission dining-room until the dawn dyed Kanchenjunga's summit gold and crimson and the brass bell summoned him to prayers.

Will Hancock, who is much too shrewd not to have suspected us of mischief, sent his ponies to the hotel for our luggage, and a messenger to bring Chullunder Ghose, thus throwing all suspicion off the scent, since nobody would dream of connecting Will with any intrigue more desperate than an assault on Shakespeare under the banner of Francis Bacon, sometime Earl of Verulam.

We rewarded him by praising his clean mission workshops, where an otherwise fortunate folk were being taught to shoulder Adam's curse and to acquire expensive tastes for unsuitable objects. We submitted to hearing uncomfortably clean, uncomprehending children sing the Ten Commandments; and in the afternoon Grim played the chapel organ, rendering "Nobody Knows How Dry I Am" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band" so wonderfully that Will Hancock thought they were from Handel. He is no authority on music.

And in the evening came Chullunder Ghose; a sturdy-legged pony panting under him; three or four chins all grinning; a new heliotrope turban impudently poised on his enormous head; and a fat, sleek, pompous, half-ingratiating, half-truculent swagger announcing the fact that he was glad to see us —not a doubt of that.

"Rammy sahib! And Jimgrim sahib! I am jolly well reborn! This babu might be father of twins, so proud I am at this summons, which is, doubtless, prelude to an offer of emolument! Oh, yes, believe me, both yours very truly! Only name job and be done with it!"

Ungraciously, because we knew him and proposed to establish sound relationships at once, we tipped him off the pony and drove rather than led him into Hancock's study, where the treatises on Francis Bacon and Mosaic miracles were heaped on chairs as well as on the desk and shelves. There was nowhere to sit except on the floor, so we arranged ourselves cross-legged in a triangle with the babu's face toward the lamp so that we might read his artfully concealed emotions. Then I held out my hand.

"GIVE me Rait's letter!" I said abruptly.

He shook hands, making believe he had not understood me.

"Rammy sahib, this is like old times," he said, heaving an enormous sigh. "How tempus does jolly well fugit. Is your honor prosperous?"

He looked much too prosperous. He had been robbing some Americans, as all Darjiling knew, and had not yet had time to lose the money by trying to treble or quadruple it.

"Rait's letter!" I repeated.

He affected not to hear and began complimenting Jimgrim on his personal appearance:

"Like money in pocket to see you,

sahib! Like sunrise on perpetual snow-peaks! This babu basks in your honor's beatific presence!"

"Rait's letter!" I said a third time, spanking a fist into my hand for emphasis.

"Sahib, I heard you first shot out of barrel. Silence means dissent—not knowing, can't say—who is Rait? What letter? And besides, I brought no documents. How should I know why you sent for me?"

"Have you read the letter?" Grim asked. "If so, tell us what was in it; bring the letter afterwards."

Chullunder Ghose rocked to and fro and scratched his stomach through the opening of an imported mauve-and-white-striped flannel shirt.

"Am all ears," he suggested. "Suitable proposition might act on memory like water from a can on radish seeds. No knowing. Might do worse than try it."

"You want a blind promise? What do you take us for?" asked Grim.

"Verity in all her nudity is priceless," said Chullunder Ghose. "Nevertheless, am scoundrel personally and would sell same. Sealed bids will be answered very promptly."

"I'll bid you a broken neck," I told him.

"You should take that bid to the police for registration," he retorted. "This babu is incorruptible by anything but bribes. Am honest scoundrel, not contemptible skin-salvationist."

"How many people besides yourself have read the letter?" Grim asked.

"Sahib, you have set accurate foot on cockroach of domestic infelicity. This babu's wife of bosom is new-fangled female who believes in ruling roost. Being virtuous mother of seven children, same being now grown up but not self-supporting—as this babu can testify on stacks of holy books of all religions—she is peevishly disposed toward secretiveness and keen on cash. Having been promised money by insidious stranger and believing, as your honors seem to do, that your humble servant had received mysterious letter from unknown correspondent, she proceeded to search all this babu's garments—drawing blank as certainly as if she had bought ticket in Calcutta Sweep."

For a while he chuckled silently, shaking his great stomach, until we grew impatient. Then:

"By and by this babu was observed to bury tin biscuit-box by moonlight, under heap of manure in which she-cobra was reported to have laid eggs. Report was false, since cobras are *non est* in neighborhood, but same made no difference to female nerves. Mongooses were bought, which slew chickens of neighbors. Wandering snake-charmers were consulted, and discovered cobras naturally, having brought same with them. Subsequently, coolies hired to rake manure heap brought forth empty biscuit-tin and were accused of having stolen all its contents. Heated acrimony, I assure you—followed by such meditation you could hear my wife's brain clicking like imported Swiss alarm-clock.

"Virtuous mother of children had to maintain innocence and yet ease strain of her increasing curiosity and appetite for money. Same is complicated process. Much housecleaning, in order to look under carpets; likewise most ill-tasting victuals, containing adulterants purchased from unlicensed bazar bootlegger of confounded drugs intended to make me talk in sleep. Resultant belly-ache, however, totally prevented sleep, and this babu's haphazard remarks were beside point altogether.

"Diet was changed, and tasted much worse. Self-preservation being first rule of all sensible religions, this babu, obeying number one rule, pretended sleep and talked much, suggesting many hiding places—in all of which nobody home! My wife is good objectionist—first class, but lacking enchantment which distance might add! Ring bell—they're off! —— take hindermost! Where do we go from here?"

Grim signaled with his eyes. I seized the babu by the arms and jerked him off his balance. Grim stuck a hand into his waist-cloth, laughed and showed Rait's letter in the lamp-light. I let go, and the babu sat up, trying to look dignified as he rearranged his turban.

"You fat scoundrel!" I said. "That is my letter, addressed to me. What do you mean by not handing it over?"

"Fat belly and fat head are not same thing!" the babu answered. "I am honest scoundrel, which is whole point."

"The seal has been broken and replaced," said Grim.

"Contents of said letter being consequently known to this babu!" remarked Chullunder Ghose and once more scratched his stomach. "Am your honors' most obedient humble servant—in predicament from which I beseech rescue for the sake of former services. Tibetan spies who offered money to my wife for information as to contents of that letter are no more eager than British authorities who did ditto."

"DO YOU want to be bribed to hold your tongue?" Grim asked him.

Chullunder Ghose looked shocked, grieved, half-incredulous.

"Jimgrim sahib, I am scoundrel from necessity, but honest always. Being short of money, through inability to pull purse-strings of tight-wad wife—to whom I gave all my money for safe-keeping, easy-going disposition and experience of up-and-downishness of fortune being —— bad mixture, I, nevertheless, scorned offers of Tibetan spies, who would have bought that letter from me, cash down—and, being refused, would undoubtedly have killed me for it, had they been sure that they knew where to find it."

"Then what do you want?" demanded Grim.

"Salary plus expenses!"

"To do what?"

"Whither thou goest, I go, same as Ruth and Boaz in English history!"

"You're a lot too fat," said Grim.

"Not so. This is all guts," said the babu, smacking his enormous thighs. Then suddenly he changed his tone of voice and began pleading, swaying back and forward, hurling the words at us.

"Sahibs! I have read that letter! You will go to Tibet. You will not be able to resist! Have I more character than you? Can I resist? I have brains—imagination—courage; I have tasted all adversities; I have encountered dangers; I am failed B. A., Calcutta University, who might have been top-notcher barrister, with only ten more marks! I am adventurer by instinct, same as you, and shall a dark skin stop me? Formerly I have shared your risks; I have been loyal to you; I have kept your secrets; I have never cheated you—not even from the petty cash box when you had your office in the Chandni Chowk in Delhi, and a child could have robbed you without your knowing it. I have never refused to obey an order. I have spied and run errands and lied for you. I have made your honor and your success mine—more than mine, for I have set them ahead of mine!

And all my life—I tell you, all my life!—I have longed, I have had an unspeakable craving to go to Tibet! Shall I let this opportunity escape me? Not so! Do you make me threaten you? Then that is your fault. You are not fools; you are strong white sahibs, who know as well as I do that the color of a man's skin is no criterion. There are white cowards and brown brave men—brown cowards and white brave men. You know that, and you have tested me a hundred times. So—scoundrel that I am—I offer you my services, to go to Tibet. Should you say yes, then I will serve you to the death. But should you say no, then I, also, will say no. You shall not go to Tibet without me, for I will tell the contents of that letter to the Tibetan spies and to the British authorities, both!"

He paused, out of breath, with his hands on his knees, his jaws, that were black with the close-shaven hair, shining with sweat in the lamp-light.

"He has more guts than I thought," said Grim. "How many people beside yourself have read the letter, babu-ji?"

"None! On my honor!"

"Were you followed to this place?"

"Maybe. I don't know. We will soon discover," said Chullunder Ghose, a trifle sulkily.

Grim signaled with his eyes again. I nodded.

"We will have to call your bluff," said Grim. "Without reading the letter, or deciding anything else, we refuse to be blackmailed. You may go and tell your tale to the authorities and get your money for it."

Chullunder Ghose looked downcast. He lowered his head for a moment so that we saw nothing but his turban.

"Too bad," he said, looking up again. "Oh, very well. I am scoundrel. I can also be magnanimous. I love you both and you may go to Tibet. I will not tell. But I am sorry. I am heart-broken babu."

"We will pay you, of course, for your silence," said Grim.

"Sahib, I refuse to take your money! Permission to you to go to Tibet is my free gift. You shall not deny me that one consolation."

Grim caught my eye again, and again I nodded.

"No," he said, "we won't deny you anything in reason. If we go to Tibet, you shall come with us."

Chullunder Ghose grinned. He did his best to look surprized, but he entirely failed. The rascal had merely shot us with the other barrel of his gun. He had been shrewd enough to realize that Grim was only testing him by offering to call his bluff. He won the trick; and neither he nor we have since regretted that he did.

CHAPTER II

RAIT'S LETTER FROM LHASSA

ELMER RAIT'S letter had been wrapped in dog-skin and then inclosed in a tough brown envelope. It smelt vaguely of *ghee*. The white paper was filthy with finger-marks, torn here and there, and turned yellow in places with age, as if Rait had made use of such stuff as he found in the markets of Lhassa.

Dear Jeff:

What on earth did we quarrel about? I forget. Nothing serious anyhow—probably ethics. You're a muscular moralist, whereas I'm practical and don't even want to make things better than they are. And here I am in Lhassa—the Forbidden City!—thinking of you, wishing you were here too, in spite of those winkers you wear, that you think are respectable compunctions, for all the world like an old maid in a bathing costume with the pants tied round her ankles. You ought to have been a bishop. You'd look splendid with a mitre and crook. And how that fist of yours would shake a pulpit! However, there is nobody quite like you; nobody quite so whole-souled in stupidity with so much force behind it; nobody quite so willing to oblige a friend, and especially when the friend least deserves it; nobody more dependable. You're like a phalanx in reserve, or a siege-train—anything heavy and honest, that can hit like Billy-o when pointed in the right direction.

Which is Tibet in this instance. Come along. I daresay money wouldn't tempt you, even though your ancestors were Scotch and you've a fortune salted down in tax-exemptums. I have spent seven years preparing for this trip, and I have got through this far as a Tibetan trader with a Chinese accent. I am after loot, though not the kind of loot that you'll appreciate—ancient manuscripts—priceless. Those won't tempt you either. This will:

I am headed for Sham-ba-la. The place is said to be fictitious, although three or four explorers have been within thirty or forty miles of it. You've heard of it, of course; you and I talked about it years ago, that time we met the Lama in Benares, who was paying his way with stamped gold ingots.

When I started out for Lhassa I was not yet sure that Sham-ba-la is a real place, but now I'm positive. I'm almost sure I can get there, and get in, but almost equally sure I can't get out again without help. Hence this S. O. S. call for the phalanx.

I will split with you fifty-fifty. It is true about the ancient libraries; the books are written on palm-leaves, treated with mastic such as the old Egyptians used, that has preserved them perfectly. They're bound with leather thongs between wooden blocks, which have had to be renewed every few centuries.

The people who live in Sham-ba-la can read those books, which are in a language much older than Sanskrit. They are not a warlike people; they will not take life; they protect themselves from intrusion and interference by taking advantage of Tibetan superstition and dislike of strangers. The Dalai Lama, who is a well meaning man, and the Tashi Lama, who is an extremely intelligent religionist, do what they are told by these Sham-ba-la people, who advise them secretly.

It would take too long to tell you how I found out all about them; but remember: although we quarreled about morals or some such nonsense, I never once gave you a wrong steer during all the years we were in partnership. If you can find my trail and come to Sham-ba-la, I promise you full pay for all your trouble—gold, priceless manuscripts and information that will make historians and scientists look sick. Think of the fun of refuting the high-brows!

Your danger will be mainly from Tibetans, who are dead set on keeping all foreigners out of the country. I have quite convinced them I was born in Tibet and kidnaped over the Chinese border in my youth, but there's a rumor that a white man has slipped in through Gyang-tse—which is the way I came—so they'll be keeping an extra-sharp lookout along that route. They strip all suspected wayfarers and search them, which is no joke with the wind at twenty below zero; so stain your skin with something permanent.

It's an awful journey, which will suit you to a T. The country is ——, and you'll like it. There's no food fit to eat, no sugar, and you mayn't smoke. The wind gives you toothache, and Tibetans never wash; dirt helps to keep them warm and fuel is scarce everywhere. Tibetans are all right—no bigger rogues than you and me—but awfully suspicious. Yes, I know well you believe you are honest. The Tibetans won't believe it, so look out for them.

Beware of women, who are in a minority in Tibet and therefore doubly dangerous. Some of them go in for polyandry, and they like men herculean, so beware. They get indignant when their overtures are turned down, and the other husbands take it as an insult to themselves, so they go after you with bows and arrows. One white man I heard of—I forget his name—fell for the proposition, hoping to find some way to visit Lhassa; he found himself one of nine and, being the latest recruit—a mere plebe, as it were—was made bell-hop to the gang. I'm told he stuck it out for five or six years, always trying to escape, until he almost forgot he was white; but one day he took a bath in a hot spring, the dye gave out, and the woman was tired of him anyway. So they had him examined by a government official, who found him guilty, had him flogged to death and fed him to the dogs. The fact that the woman and all her other husbands were also flogged to death was not much consolation to him. Better avoid matrimony, even at the risk of seeming rude.

Don't trust any one on British territory, except Chullunder Ghose, who is an impudent scoundrel but extremely fond of you. Him you will have to trust, so make the best of it. You had better bring him with you; he will die in the passes, which is the best thing that could happen to him. You will probably need one confidant who can make the grade, but whatever you do, don't bring along a white man. Choose some one you can kick, and who won't much matter if he dies. Any white man would be certain to turn quarrelsome, at this elevation, with the bad grub, and dirt, and one thing and another. Particularly, don't bring Jimgrim or Narayan Singh. I know they're your friends, or you think they are, but I hate them both. They think they know too much, and neither of them has the slightest use for me.

You must make your way toward Lhassa and work that great lump of a head of yours for all it's worth. Discover my Tibetan name and where I am. Naturally, I don't dare to write my Tibetan name in this letter, which might fall into the wrong hands, in spite of all precautions. You will have to prospect for me. You remember those marks we used to make on rocks when we were prospecting? Look out for those or something like them. Wherever you see such a mark beside the main road you may look for a message in writing not far from it—probably hidden under the stones of one of the countless roadside cairns on which each passer-by sticks a prayer-flag.

You can't get in through China, because the Chinese and Tibetans haven't made peace, except nominally, and both sides have blocked the frontier. They say it's equally impossible to get down through Siberia, because the Soviet people have closed all routes, which are said to be almost impassable anyhow. Sven Hedin came up several years ago along the Valley of the Indus, while the Maharajah of Kashmir pretended to look the other way; there was an awful row about it, and the odds are that way's blocked; the maharajah won't dare look away another time. You'd better take the least used and most difficult route you can find, and hold your tongue about it.

The chief danger, of course, is from spies on the Indian side of the border, who might learn of your intentions and tip off the Lhassa government. There's a telegraph wire between Lhassa and Gyang-tse, at which latter place there's a British officer and a small detachment of troops, who help the Tibetans to watch the border. It's the funniest amateur telegraph set you ever saw, but it serves its purpose, which is to help them keep out foreigners.

Kashmiris and Bhutanis are allowed to travel in Tibet without much interference. Let your beard grow, curl it, and you'll look enough like a Kashmiri merchant to get by, provided you don't talk too much. Don't kid yourself that you can speak Kashmiri like a native. You never could. You can't. You never will. You can look the part, and you're a better actor than your idiotic modesty allows you to pretend. So pretend to be sick—or be deaf and dumb—or mad. Affliction is a passport everywhere. You always were mad anyhow; you ought to find that rôle easy.

Either I am on the track of the most important discovery of modern times, or else I will explode a fable that a third of the world has believed so long that it has become a tenet of religion. After seven years' preparation and inquiry I am confident that this is not a mare's nest, however, and that the results will exceed expectations. The main trouble will be to get out with the loot, which is why it's so important you should come.

My argument is this; these men in Sham-ba-la possess important secrets, and they are clever enough to have kept themselves hidden—almost, you might say, a myth—for centuries, although in ancient times there used to be a traveled highway to their door, all the way across Asia from Europe. Why they withdrew into their shell, I don't know. It is said that Pythagoras went to them; and so did Lao-Tse. They hide themselves, and they protect themselves behind the screen of the Tibetans' savagery, but they won't take life. So, if we can penetrate the screen, we're safe.

Do you remember the story about that woman who once overheard the secrets of Freemasonry? They couldn't kill her. They couldn't turn her loose with their secrets. They had to admit her into the order. Why she didn't take advantage of them to start a lodge for women and make herself grand-mistress of it, is beyond me to imagine. Some weird point of morals probably, which certainly would never limit me.

From what I have heard, and definitely ascertained, and guessed—one thing added to another—I believe that I can get through and oblige these Sham-ba-la people to admit me into their secrets. If they can find some way of binding me that will mean more to me than a wisp of straw, good luck to them. I'll give them best if they can prove it; but they will have to prove something more than that they can make me take an oath on an ancient book. To get there, to meet them, and to force their hand, is up to me. To make me keep their secrets after that is up to them. They'll have to use their wits if they propose to pack me off without an armful of their ancient books—if nothing else. And get this: I am told there is a manuscript in the handwriting of Jesus!

So now you know enough to start you rolling blankets. Bring no tobacco with you, but as much sugar as you can hide among your loads; there isn't any sugar in all Tibet, and you'll crave it like a hop-head yelling for his coke.

If you should get any hint of my whereabouts before you reach Lhassa, leave Lhassa out of your itinerary. The monks here are fanatical, suspicious, quarrelsome and rather wide awake. Be careful at the wayside inns, where there are always spies, who get paid by results and are therefore keen on the job.

Wear snow spectacles, and don't wash. A clean man, who has no lice on him, is certain to arouse suspicion. There—I think that's all. I'm going to count on you to come, and shall make all my plans accordingly. You will suit yourself, of course. But if you don't come you will have it on your conscience that you left me in the lurch, after my running the prodigious risk of writing you this letter, which might easily betray me if the wrong man should get hold of it. Just for once in your life don't moralize—don't preach to yourself—don't get all bogged up in a sticky code of out-of-fashion ethics, but remember I was once your partner, and come just as fast as your obstinate old guts can bring you." Yours,

E. R."

I READ the letter aloud to Grim.

"I hope they've fed him to the dogs," he commented. "He's rotten!"

"Nevertheless," remarked Chullunder Ghose, "he is absolutely right about Narayan Singh, who should not come with us. That Sikh slew the Dead Sea! This babu is pretty good insurance risk without Narayan Singh to get us into trouble by sticking his sword into all-comers. Am pacificist for totally immoral reasons, same being it is safer. Smack me and I smack you. Smile, and the world regards you as pigeon whom it can pluck much less aggressively. Let us therefore not be aggressees but leave Narayan Singh behind."

"He's in the railway police now," Grim remarked. "Generally on duty at one of the Delhi stations, watching passengers off the express trains."

"How democratic! Am already outvoted!" said Chullunder Ghose. "That Sikh will increase majority to three to one. Am personally G. B. Shavian opinionist, believing that majorities are always wrong—but never mind, I would rather be wrong than have to live in a barrel like Diogenes. It is also better to pay income-taxes than to be a hermit. Let us make plans."

CHAPTER III

BENJAMIN

IT WAS not long before we learned that we had failed to throw spies off the scent. That night we sat up late discussing Tibet with Will Hancock, who had a surprizing amount of information about the country. We did not admit to him that we intended to make our way over the border, he being one of those conscientious men who would have felt obliged to inform the government of anything he actually knew. But he is no man's fool; he answered all our questions without committing any such indiscretion as to ask us questions in return.

Will Hancock's chief anxiety was the season of the year. It was already autumn; the monsoon was likely to break at almost any time, after which the valleys and all the lower slopes of the Himalayas would be deluged, and the upper passes would be blocked with snow. However, he had other reasons for instilling caution.

"Some people enjoy disobeying governments," he said, blinking at us through his horn-rimmed spectacles. "But up in Tibet they have made a cult of disobedience to God! It is a lie that there is any pure philosophy or pure religion up there. What there is is sorcery—black magic—the same evil that the witch of Endor practised and that brought Sodom and Gomorrah to their ruin—that alliance with the powers of evil that the Apostle Paul denounced. With all my heart I would advise any one against trespassing in Tibet."

"You should publish a book on the subject," said Grim.

"What—and advertise iniquity?"

Will Hancock lectured us for hours on the sin of curiosity, but at the end of it I think he realized he had only contrived to arouse that vice in us.

Next morning there was a great bell-ringing at the outer gate and a man named Tsang-Mondrong, a Tibetan, asked to see the white sahibs.

"Was fifty-fifty spy of both sides on Younghusband expedition!" said Chullunder Ghose. But Grim, who was on that expedition too, did not remember him.

He turned out to be one of those products of the meeting of the East and West who can speak English with extraordinary fluency, and who think they understand the Western point of view so well as to be able to impose their espionage unsuspected. He had been keeping watch on Chullunder Ghose and had simply followed him out to the mission.

He pretended to think that Grim and I were planning an expedition after big game, asked whether we had permits and offered his services as guide, saying he knew some good bear country and some trails leading northward that were hardly ever used, and consequently teeming with big game of all kinds. It was a ridiculously obvious trap to get us to reveal our plans to him. He sat there itching to be questioned.

SO WE told him we were leaving for Bombay and Europe; and to convince him I asked him to take a telegram back to Darjiling for despatch to Bombay, ordering reservations on the earliest available steamer, but wording the telegram in such way that the steamer people would not accept it as a definite order. He agreed to take the telegram but hung around all morning questioning the mission servants, and even trying to get Hancock to reveal our confidences.

He was one of the ugliest men I have ever seen, and the more we saw of him the more hideous he seemed to become. In the first place, he was pock-marked, and the pits were so deep and wide that they resembled the craters on the moon seen through a high-powered telescope. He had the usual Mongolian high cheek-bones and more or less almond eyes; but his eyes were yellow, not brown, with a tinge of green in them, and as he had neither eyelashes nor eyebrows the effect was gruesome. Where eyebrows should have been there was a scar that looked as if it might have been made by a whip-thong. The teeth of his lower jaw projected, and when he grinned, which he did almost whenever he spoke, his lower lip drew downward and displayed the gum. His skin was the color of raw pig's liver. His neck was so short that his head seemed to grow from his shoulders, which were extremely wide. He had unusually long arms, a long body, and legs much too short for his height; the sleeves of his bazaar-made khaki jacket hardly came below his elbows, whereas his trousers had to be rolled up several inches. One foot was considerably larger than the other.

Yet, in spite of those deformities, he was as active as a cat, and though his head was narrow and stupid-looking—he actually was stupid in many respects almost to the verge of idiocy—he was very sharp-witted and far-sighted, as well as persistent, along lines where he thought his own particular personal interests were concerned.

"He will be harder to get rid of than a louse without disinfectant," said Chullunder Ghose. "He will take that telegram and show it to the authorities, to prove to them that we do not need to be watched, by that means securing a monopoly of watching us. Thus, when the time comes to betray us he will not need to share the reward; and he will certainly first blackmail us out of our senses before handing over what is left of us for the authorities to jump on. Argue with me! Subdue me with violence! Make rude remarks about my mother! Prove to me, black on white, that I am wrong! Nevertheless, I know and I have told you."

Chullunder Ghose was right, and we believed him, but we had a plan that, we thought, would hide our objective and make it appear mere waste of time to shadow us. The trails leading into Tibet by way of Sikkim and Bhutan are more numerous than many people think, and some of them are not so difficult as rumor makes them out to be. Armies, for instance, have marched over those passes in mid-winter, and there is hardly any season of the year when Tibetans are unable to reach India, if they wish. But all the well known routes were certain to be watched, especially since it was now known to the Tibetans as well as the British Government that Rait had crossed the border; and though we did not actually know of any other route than those marked on the maps, we had more reasons than one for going first of all to Delhi.

In Delhi was our friend Narayan Singh, whom we proposed to take with us. And in Delhi was a Jew named Benjamin, who certainly has never been in Tibet, but whose net-work of business connections is like a ganglion of nerves that ramify through Asia.

So to Delhi we made our way by train from Darjiling, attracting as little attention to ourselves as possible and marking "Bombay" on our luggage labels. Darjiling is the mountain terminus of a two-foot gauge line that runs through some of the finest scenery in the world to Siliguri, which is the main-line junction. On Darjiling station was the usual crowd of Lepchas, Nepalis, Eurasians, Sikkimese, Bengalis, nondescripts and a scattering of Europeans, and there were certainly police spies in the crowd, some of whom studied our luggage labels. Three men and a woman were within earshot when we bought the tickets, and one half-naked individual appeared to be watching Chullunder Ghose to see whether or not he was in attendance on us. But there was no sign of Tsang-Mondrong until the whistle blew for the train to start. Then, leaning out of a window, I saw him run out of the waiting-room and jump into a third class carriage.

At Siliguri he concealed himself behind a mound of luggage; but I saw him leave his lurking place to buy a ticket and when the main-line train came in he boarded it. Thereafter, at every station at which the express stopped on the way to Delhi he was out on the platform watching for us.

Chullunder Ghose came into our compartment and regaled us with some gloomy reminiscences. He appeared already to have lost all confidence in the success of our adventure.

"Tsang-Mondrong," he said, "is identical swine who gave lessons in Tibetan to Rait sahib, continuing same for six months until discovered tearing secret notes out of a memorandum book. Rait sahib being little man, resultant fight was jolly well worth one rupee admission. This babu witnessed that imbroglio and afterward assisted to recorrect alignment of Tibetan's limbs, Rait sahib having ju-jitsued hind leg into place where teeth should be and vice versa. Reconstruction was like Chinese puzzle with directions how to open it inside. Tsang-Mondrong probably is contemplating vengeance, hoping to trace Rait sahib by following us. You may think you know a lot, but you have no idea how these savages pursue a vengeance to the limit. Wait and see!"

HOWEVER, there is such a thing as luck, although it usually comes with a sting in its tail, and having made you overconfident, presents you with a crisis and deserts you when you least expect it. On the Delhi station platform was Narayan Singh in khaki uniform with a row of medal-ribbons on his breast. His black beard parted in a flashing smile the moment he saw us, and he came running, waving his arm commandingly for porters, in two minds, whether to salute or to throw convention to the winds and shake us by the hand.

"Sahibs!" he exclaimed. "Sahibs!" He seemed more glad to see us than if we had been brothers risen from the grave. "What now? This police work is no trade for a man like me!"

Grim took him by the elbow and pointed out Tsang-Mondrong, who was making his way through the crowd toward the exit where he would be able to keep an eye on us.

"Arrest him!" said Grim.

"Keep him under lock and key until we've given him the slip. Then chuck your job and come to us at Benjamin's."

He grinned. A minute later the Tibetan made the grave mistake of offering resistance to arrest and, furthermore, misjudged Narayan Singh's strength, which is not much less than mine. Three policemen came up on the run with their yellow truncheons swinging, and Tsang-Mondrong had not even enough senses left to be meek with by the time the handcuffs had been snapped on. He was hurled into the station lock-up and there held incommunicado for the ambulance.

Grim and I took one cab, Chullunder Ghose another, and we drove by different routes through the swarming, stinking streets to Benjamin's, in the Chandni Chowk, which is the old Street of the Silversmiths, the heart of the business zone of modern Delhi. The old Jew's shop draws no attention to itself, its narrow, shabby-looking front being wedged between two warehouses, but that appearance is deceptive; the narrow front part where the counter is, with a row of shelves behind it, leads to a curtain at the rear beside a stairway, and beyond that is a vast and shadowy warehouse where the odds and ends of all the world, from London to Pekin, are piled in heaps amid a smell of saddlery, dried camel-sweat old clothes and spices.

THE old Jew received us warily, his red-rimmed eyes betraying nervousness, artistic looking fingers scratching his chin through a long beard streaked with gray.

"Jimgrim!" he said. "Ramsden! Tschatscha! Vultures! Kites! When you gather, there is trouble! What now?"

We sat down on a pile of carpets in the gloom and lighted cigarets before we answered, he peering at us, slightly stooped, kneading his fingers together—a typical Asian Jew, if there is such a thing, more nervous than a bird and full of wisdom won in combat with the world's unfairness—timid where a gentile would be rash, bold where a gentile would not dare to venture—generous, thrifty, honest, a keen bargainer contemptuous of fools—a man of strong affections and extreme fears.

"Confidences, Benjamin," I said, when I had smoked about a quarter of a cigaret and Grim continued silent.

"Nah-nah! Keep your confidences! Those are dangerous!"

He scratched his head, pushing his embroidered silk turban forward over his forehead.

"When did you begin to play safe?" Grim inquired.

"Nobody brings confidences here unless he wants money or—"

"Give him our money," said Grim, and I began to count out Bank of England notes.

"Trouble!" said Benjamin. "I smell trouble! Take your money to the bankers!"

"The clerks who keep bank ledgers sell their information. You know that as well as I do, Benjamin," said Grim. "Give us a receipt, and tell us how to get to Tibet."

He flew into a passion of denials, swearing he knew nothing about Tibet, never had been there, knew nobody who had been, had had nothing to do with the country at any time, and did not intend to have anything to do with it.

"And I am old," he added. "I know best."

"It is because you are old, and you know, and we know you, that we have come to you," said Grim.

"But it is against the law! There is an order in council—"

"Benjamin," said Grim, "who thought about orders in council, or law, when your relatives were starving in a Turkish prison and Jeff Ramsden helped them out? Did you study law when you hid Rabindra Das after the Amritsar business and helped him escape into Persia?"

"Who told you that?" Benjamin demanded.

"Rabindra Das. I also helped him to escape." said Grim.

"Yei-yei-yei—who shall keep secrets while you live, Jimgrim? How many of you go to Tibet?"

"Jeff and I, Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose."

"Tshuh! You talk madness! You—yes—maybe. Ramsden? Better take an elephant! Chullunder Ghose? Narayan Singh? The one will talk to all-comers and try to sell lottery tickets to the Tashi Lama; the other will offer to fight the whole Tibetan army!"

Nevertheless, Benjamin took up the money from the mat and went to a desk in the corner to write a receipt. It was while he was doing that, that Chullunder Ghose came in, as genial and confident as if he owned the store with none of its responsibilities.

"Salaam, Benjamin! Salaam, O chosen person! Son of the great Joshua who made the sun stand still, salaam! We wish for chariot of Elijah in which to cross Himalayan mountains; order same for us, taking care that taximeter has been properly inspected—submarine of Jonah being useless in this instance! Nevertheless, be careful of police, who will look up chariot's license number!"

Benjamin eyed him sourly; there had never been love lost between them—as there never is when one man laughs at life and at himself, while the other takes all things seriously. Benjamin, who probably has suffered less from disappointment than Chullunder Ghose, and who at any rate has grown rich, resents the suggestion that life is a comedy, whereas the babu, who was ever a spendthrift, mocks death itself, since he believes that death is nothing but the end of an illusion.

"That fool will ruin you," said Benjamin, inviting a retort that might lead to an excuse to wash his hands of us.

But the babu sat still, like a contemplative idol, only opening one eye a trifle wider as Narayan Singh strode in.

THE Sikh was no longer in uniform, but he stood before us with arms folded on his breast and a soldier's attitude toward life's problems stamped all over him.

"The Tibetan Tsang-Mondrong will undoubtedly receive a month's hard labor for resisting three policemen," he announced. They three, not I, have charged him, being young men seeking credit—thus releasing me from having to give evidence. Tsang-Mondrong is unknown in Delhi, so can call no witnesses. What next do we undertake?"

"Tibet," I said; and he grinned.

It is impossible to write of him without emotion. Even in this draughty cave, with a ninety-mile wind howling across barren wastes outside, I grow warm at the thought of him; and I can write of him with less restraint, since he is dead—having died as calmly as he lived, thrusting himself into danger for the sake of others.

He was a soldier first and last, with all of a Sikh soldier's ruthlessness when it came to action, but a patience beyond praise until the moment came when patience would no longer be a virtue. He regarded this life, in so far as I could ever dig down through the silences to his philosophy, as something like an armed camp, in which all the hosts of evil are arrayed against each individual's manhood. When he killed—and he must have slain his dozens—he did it with a strange impersonality that in no way handicapped his zeal or efficiency. He never boasted—had no pride in any ordinary meaning of the term—and undertook the meanest task without a moment's hesitation, being utterly above all caste restrictions. And he went off into the unknown with us with no more fuss or excitement than if he were about to cross the street.

He stalked through the world like a stranger to it, having no home ties I ever heard of, and no religious interests that he ever mentioned—a thing very unusual in a Sikh. I never saw him pray, nor heard him say a word against another man's religion, except good-naturedly, when Chullunder Ghose or some one else teased him.

He was a friend—a grand ally—an uncomplaining messmate in extremity—and an enigma. I can not explain him. If there is truth in what the Eastern sages teach, then one might guess that he was marking time between two lives, perhaps a great man in the last one and to be a great one in the next. I don't pretend to know; I am only hazarding an explanation of him that, while not explaining, may suggest a mental picture of him.

It is easier to describe him as he stood there beside Benjamin the Jew and waited for us to issue marching orders—tall, statuesque, with dark-brown eyes that never seemed to sleep, immensely dignified without a trace of cheap conceit, his black beard curled and his mustache turned rather fiercely upward. Sabered or not, he always stood as if there were a saber at his waist. When not in action his arms were usually folded on his breast and his eyes appeared to search horizons—or infinity.

I gave him Rait's letter to read and he went to where a beam of sunlight shone through the open doorway, to sit down on a bale of merchandise and pore over the difficult handwriting, his lips moving as he construed it word by word into his own tongue.

"Outfit?" asked Benjamin and beckoned an assistant, pointing with a yard-stick at the things we might require, which the assistant dragged down from the shelves and piled into a heap.

But that was no more than an excuse for not talking to us; the old Jew kept muttering to himself, gesturing disgustedly, as if rejecting one thought, then another.

"Which way will you go? By way of Sikkim?" he asked suddenly.

Grim nudged me, and none of us answered. In the East it is invariably wiser to say nothing than to answer foolishly. A random answer, yes or no, shuts off negotiation.

"If you take my advice, you won't go at all," said Benjamin. "Winter! Winter before you can reach the passes! Do you know what that means?"

"It means no trouble with frontier guards," said Grim.

"Tschah! They will find your frozen bodies in the spring, and strip them!" Benjamin said, frowning.

He turned away from us, and Grim nudged me again. The old Jew's hands were moving as if he were tossing something—weighing it.

"Sure," said Grim, "we'll do your business for you!"

Benjamin faced about suddenly.

"What do you know?" he demanded. "You, Jimgrim, what do you know?"

He scowled at Chullunder Ghose and glanced once or twice at the Sikh, who was still studying the letter.

"One man is a risk. Four men are four times the risk! I tell you, Jim-grim—"

"Trust me, trust my friends," Grim interrupted.

⁂

BENJAMIN resumed his fossicking among the shelves, pulling out cooking-pots, knives, leather caps, yak-hair blankets, yak-skin overcoats, heaping them all on the floor until there seemed enough for a young army. Narayan Singh came striding to where we sat and handed me Rait's letter.

"Yes," he said, "I come with you. But Rait is no good."

"Sikh!" exclaimed Benjamin, and came and stood close to him. "What if I don't trust you? What if I refuse? What then?"

Narayan Singh laughed tolerantly.

"I have lived these many years without your aid," he answered. "Jew, do you own Tibet?"

Benjamin displayed two rows of yellow teeth with gaps between them—more a grimace than a grin.

"You Sikh! You think, if I refuse, you can make a trouble for me?"

Narayan Singh laughed again.

"Jew, you have trouble enough," he retorted. "Give help or withhold it. I will go to Tibet."

Benjamin nodded, relaxing exactly as if pain had left him.

"Where is Mordecai?" Chullunder Ghose asked suddenly. "Is Mordecai in Tibet?"

Benjamin stared at him, startled. Grim smiled; it was his question; he had prompted the babu in a whisper. Grim and I both knew Mordecai, although it was several years since we last saw him—in Damascus, whither he had brought the goods of the Bokhara Jews by caravan while the war was raging. Mordecai had married Benjamin's fat daughter—he being a man whom nothing terrified. He was a sort of Marco Polo among bargain-hunters, looking for his merchandise where most men thought none existed, and selling it in New York—London—Paris—Moscow—anywhere where profits could be made; a daring wanderer with a vocabulary made up from a dozen languages and a line of impudence that he himself invented.

Benjamin beckoned Grim and me into a small, dark inner room, where he lighted a lamp that had a broken chimney.

"Who will do a favor for an old Jew?" he asked, the lamp trembling in his hand. "It is 'Jew, do this for me! Jew, do that for me!' But if the Jew wants favors he must—"

"— say exactly what he does want," Grim suggested.

"Will you find Mordecai? Will you take a message to him? Nah-nah!"

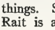
"Why not? Tell us where he is," said Grim.

"God knows where he is!" said Benjamin. "He went to Tibet—but not by the route that you shall use—he traveled swiftly. Twenty years I have been known to the Tibetans, though I have never been to Lhassa. Mordecai has been three times. I am purchasing agent. Also I supply them information—but the Indian Government does not know that. Why do you wish to go to Tibet?"

Grim said as much about Rait as could be told within the compass of a hundred words.

"Do you know Rait?" he asked.

"No," said Benjamin. "Mordecai knows him. Mordecai met him in Simla—met him again in Darjiling. Rait asked Mordecai so many questions that my son-in-law put two and two together. There are questions such as fools ask—questions such as men ask who will write books—questions such as men ask who will go, look, see for themselves—you understand me? He is a rogue of an explorer, is that fellow Mordecai; there are no mysteries too far away for him; like a hound he goes after them all, and he loves to be the first one to discover things. Said Mordecai, 'I know what Rait is after. I will go ahead of him. Give me a passport to Lhassa.'



"SO, BECAUSE he makes a good profit wherever he goes, I gave him a report from Moscow for the Dalai Lama. Those Soviet people have been thinking about Tibet; I had news about it from my cousin, who is a commissar as they call them; so I warned the Dalai Lama. But there is no news now from Mordecai since seven months. I am thinking Rait has killed him."

I laughed at that, believing I knew Rait.

"Butter," I said, "would melt in Rait's mouth, but he isn't a highbinder."

"Nah-nah! You don't know!" Benjamin retorted. "That Roof of the World makes men like animals! The search for sacred things makes devils of them! Did people flay and burn us Jews for the love of money? Nah-nah-nah! They did it for religion—for the things they thought are holy! There are older and holier books than the Cabala up there in Tibet. And there are worse things than crime! There is madness there! What if Rait kills Mordecai? Will you four bring him back to life? What if the black evil gets him? You Jimgrim—you Ramsden—maybe you are all right, you two. You two may be proof against the evil. But the Sikh? The Bengali? Who shall know their hearts? I have my daughter, and her daughters—little ones—no male heir except Mordecai. He has been better than a first-born."

"Yet you let him go to Tibet?" Grim suggested.

Benjamin snapped his fingers, cracking all the knuckle-bones, and drew a long breath inward through his teeth.

"Can you tie a Jew up in a stable?" he asked. "Who was it went with Christopher Columbus? Jews! The sun stood still on Gideon and the moon in the valley of Avalon, but not the Jews—nah-nah! But a Jew can be caught by the evil—the black evil! If I help you into Tibet, will you find my Mordecai and bring him back to me?"

The heat was stifling in that inner room. The lamp smoked as it trembled in the old Jew's hand, and we sweated in streams, but we had to use patience. Men like Benjamin know only too well, and too bitterly, what happens when the West joins hands with them; labor and risk fall to the Asian; the rewards go to the white man's country. Grim and I had proved to Benjamin a time or two that, though we might not have it in us to keep faith exactly as the East interprets it, we were men of our word and fair according to our lights. But he was nervous.

"If I show you a secret—a secret route into the heart of Tibet—how long will it be a secret after that?" he demanded. "You two—maybe I will take a chance on you; but those two? Listen to me! Twenty long years I have kept the secret; and the English, they knew I knew it—teasing, coaxing, threatening, spying on me, offering this and that—trade opportunities, contracts, anything I please if I will show that route to them. What was it to me, if I should lose the Lhassa business? Nothing! The English would have paid the profit back twice over. Why then? Why will a woman not yield to a man—though she love him—though he offer her a fortune? It is her honor, isn't it? They'll tell you Jews know nothing about honor. Eh-heh! They who have tried to buy my secret will say that to you! And if I tell you, am I better than a woman who has yielded?"

"Oh well, all four of us will probably get killed," said Grim.

"Tschah-h-h! Much good that would do me! Shall I ever look the Lamas in the face again? But Mordecai—" he set the lamp down—"I have no other first-born. Will you bring me news of him?"

"Maybe."

"But will you look for him?"

"Judge that for yourself," Grim answered. "We could promise anything. As for your secret—if we buy it from you, we would have the right to sell it."

"Nothing for nothing!" Benjamin began.

"Rot!" said Grim. "You talk about a woman's virtue. Will you sell yours? We four—or whichever of us lives—will look for Mordecai and bring you word of him. Keep your virgin-secret until you like some one well enough to sacrifice it! Let's get out of this hole; there's no air."

Benjamin stood with his left hand on the door-latch. Grim's face, filthy with the lamp-smoke, smiled at him poker-wise; there was no reading it. I felt that we had lost the trick, but I tried to disguise the feeling and searched for a last argument to change the old fellow's mind.

"Look here, Benjamin," I began; but he shook his head at me and held his hand up.

"Shuh-shuh-shuh-shuh—sheyh!" he interrupted. "Beat a dead horse, will you? Am I saying no? I will give you a writing that will take you all the way to Tibet.

"Jimgrim!" he said, clutching him by the arm, "you are a wise one! You know the trick of how to win! You should have been a Jew, you, Jimgrim!"

CHAPTER IV

TSANG-YANG

SOME men yearn to become bishops; probably that yearning makes them put their utmost into life, which is the only way to extract one's share of satisfaction. I have met, and known and liked men who could not resist the lure of a stage-door. One of my most respected friends will cross the world to hunt for a rare butterfly in fever-swamps. And I know a woman, whose wealth, youth, popularity and family combined can not prevent her from sailing the ocean alone in a thirty-foot sloop for weeks at a time when certain impulses, as unexplainable as life itself, assert their recurring spell. I don't believe it matters which enthusiasm we adopt, provided we have one and drive it, or let it drive us, for all it and we are worth.

The same lure that had beckoned Rait and Mordecai had stirred whatever it is that differentiates us men from mushrooms, in Chullunder Ghose, Narayan Singh, Grim and me. Not one of us—not even Benjamin, who unlocked a secret door for us—even remotely guessed what lay ahead. We simply listened to an icy siren-song blown to us over the Roof of the World, and responded because there would have been no peace within us otherwise.

Out of that agglomeration of worldcombings that he calls his shop, old Benjamin supplied equipment, even including an excellent compass, and maps copied—doubtless without permission—from the survey department files. Such few things as he did not have in stock he personally bought for us—forceps, for instance, for pulling teeth, a quantity of patent anæsthetic, bandages, brandy, sugar, and beef extract; so that we did not need to be seen wandering about Delhi.

He sent a man far into Kashmir to buy ponies for us, with the result that we were supplied with the best, instead of incurring the usual fate of those who buy from strangers in a hurry. Night after night, when the store was closed and his fat daughter had spread food for us on a carpet beneath an old temple lamp, he told us all he knew about Tibetans and their country. It was he who stained my skin so admirably that the color still endures, although I have been half-boiled in natural hot-springs and half-frozen in the Tsang-po River.

There was no need to darken Grim's tough hide; it had been sun-baked so that he was actually darker than Narayan Singh, although one did not realize it until he disguised himself in the native costume. Benjamin seemed to have no fear whatever on Grim's account, although he was in agonies of apprehension about the rest of us—Chullunder Ghose particularly—delaying us for three days after our equipment was all ready, because he did not believe his instructions had sufficiently soaked in.

There was something that he feared more than any physical danger, and I think Grim knew what it was, although Benjamin would only hint at it, shuddering and throwing up his hands in pious horror. But in all other respects he was minutely definite.

He warned us against smoking, which is a crime in Tibet; never to pass on our left-hand side any religious monument or any individual entitled to respect; not to shoot wild game, and not to be seen eating chicken or drinking milk.

But above all, he advised me to be silent. Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose could get by as Kashmiri merchants, who are allowed in Tibet. Grim, if extremely careful, might even pass as a Tibetan. As for me, my accent being amateurish and vocabulary limited, speech with any stranger would be out of the question, once over the border.

"Be you deaf and dumb!" he insisted. "These are your friends, who are taking you to the medical college on the Chakpo Hill outside of Lhassa, hoping you may be cured by a miracle. Yeh-tschah-tschah! And a miracle it is, when they cure anybody! Anatomy they know—a little—since they cut up corpses; and they have nine poisons that are unknown to the European chemists, but they are the worst doctors in the world! Be you a doctor, Ramsden. Toothache is their commonest complaint. Pull teeth for nothing, and so win their gratitude—because the monks charge too much. If they are grateful they may not be so suspicious. But you mustn't talk—nah-nah—not one word—*niemals!*

"You have had a curse put on you by a Hindu hakim; the babu can tell that story, he being a very good one at inventing lies. The Tibetans know all about curses. They know too much about them! If you cure their toothaches they will not ask many questions. But, though you say you are going to Chakpo, don't you let their doctors touch you! They are fiends—bad, ignorant fiends; yet they know altogether too much! If they suspect you, they will simply poison your body. But better that than fall into the power of certain others. There are sons of evil up there."

The road is free and open into Kashmir, which is a tourists' Mecca nowadays, with shops for the sale of imported souvenirs and a better system for fleecing Americans than even Deauville and the Riviera boast. We went by train to Rawalpindi—third class, trying out our new disguises—and I did so well that I was actually struck by an Eurasian conductor, who mistook my silence for fear of himself and his official buttons.

BECAUSE he overlooks no chance to turn a profit, and also, perhaps, to make our own peculiarly packed loads less conspicuous, Benjamin entrusted us with nearly two tons of merchandize consigned to his agents in Srinagar. So we hired an auto-truck in Rawalpindi, along with a driver and two helpers; but we had to wait three days for Benjamin's freight to overtake us, and a letter from Benjamin reached us by special messenger—not one of his own clerks, however—three or four hours before the freight train dawdled in.

The letter was alarming. We had left

Tsang-Mondrong, we imagined, snugly incommunicado in the jail, the expected thirty-day sentence having been promptly passed on him by the Mahommedan magistrate. Nevertheless, Benjamin wrote that a Tibetan had been hanging around the store and asking questions.

"As for me, I told him nothing, but he may have learned much from one of my assistants, who is a Klapperstorch. Nor do I dare to send one of my own men with this letter, lest the Tibetan should follow him. This messenger has been paid, but you will do well to pay him again, so that he may go away and get drunk and perhaps get himself into a trouble before he makes a greater one for you."

So we paid the man twice what the service was worth, and Grim took him off to a reeking hole where an Eurasian sold arrack, not leaving him until he had drunk the best part of a bottle of the stuff and was in no fit state to tell an intelligible story, to Tibetans or any one else. Meanwhile, Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose spread talk through the bazaar that might lead people to believe we were heading southward again. Then, hoping at any rate that we had thrown spies off the scent, we stacked our loads on to the truck and started for Murree and the Kashmir Pass.

We had a letter from Benjamin, containing hardly fifty words, in a language that only Grim could read, which the old Jew guaranteed should open for us a route along which pursuit would be impossible; but before we could use that key we must put all of Kashmir behind us. Beyond the Kashmir Valley, between us and Ladakh where the secret route began, was the Zogi-la Pass, eleven thousand feet above sea-level. The road across the Zogi-la is open all winter long, except for a dozen miles or so, but those dozen miles might as well be fifty, once the winter storms begin; so our first task was to cross the Zogi-la before the snow fell, after which the sooner the nor'-westers should blow the drifts deep into the narrow gorge and shut off all pursuit, the better.

It was the end of the summer season. Tourists and officials on vacation poured out through the pass, the stream of motor cars and carts constantly delaying us, since there are only certain places where wheeled traffic can pass. Threading our way patiently against the hurrying flood of tourist-cars and luggage trucks, we might have excited curiosity if we had been dressed as Europeans, but as Kashmiri merchants we only drew down objurgations on our heads.

In spite of old Benjamin's mysterious hints, we felt like schoolboys on a picnic. There was exhilaration in the air—a certain wine-like sharpness and a wind that bore the dust along in clouds, but not a hint yet of the Himalayan winter, although Narayan Singh swore once or twice that he could smell snow. We mocked his pessimism and enjoyed the scenery, behind a driver who scorned precipices.

I had not adopted the deaf and dumb rôle yet, but kept my head wrapped in a shawl, pretending to have toothache on both sides of my mouth, in order to avoid conversation with strangers. But by night, when we cooked our meal beside the truck preparatory to sleeping underneath it, we were at the mercy of benevolence; there is a freemasonry of sickness, and the native Indian is nothing if not inquisitive. Men camped near-by came to sit beside us and compare notes, keeping Grim, Narayan Singh and Chullunder Ghose in turn busy answering questions about what ailed me, and I was offered remedies that ranged all the way from opium to powdered brick from a Moslem martyr's tomb.

However, we were not in actual danger of discovery until we bumped and swung downhill toward the Kashmir Valley, where the River Jhelum lay like a turquoise ribbon winding through a paradise of green and amber. At the foot of the last decline, beside a bridge, Kashmiri officials waited to take toll of our belongings and examine all loads for contraband; and while they overhauled the truck, I sat down in its shadow.

Grim talked to the officials and so entertained them that they neglected to open our important bundles, in which the unregistered rifles were concealed; and Chullunder Ghose explained to a dozen Kashmiris, who were loafing, looking on, over-curious, that I was suffering from a disease so contagious as to poison people if my breath should touch them.

THAT was all very well for the time being, but one of them, out of the kindness of his heart, went and fetched a Parsee doctor, who was making his way in a car to the plains after a vacation spent in Srinagar.

The Parsee was as kind and fussy and insistent as if I had been his wife's relation. Since he did not know any more of the Kashmiri tongue than I did, it was easy enough to escape suspicion on the score of language, but I had to show him my mouth and the absence of any signs of sickness puzzled him. He took my temperature and, finding that normal, invited me to strip myself and submit to a swift physical examination.

I refused for religious reasons—always a reliable excuse for anything in India, and though he continued to try to persuade me, making use of every argument a decent doctor could, I think he had about exhausted both his patience and enthusiasm and would have left me to rot of any disease I wished, but for one of those apparently insignificant incidents that so often upset calculations.

Narayan Singh, begging a ride on a government mule-wagon, had gone forward into Srinagar to see about our lodgings for the night and there was nobody near our truck except the Parsee doctor and myself. One of our heavier loads, disarranged by the customs crew, teetered on the truck's edge and would have fallen on the Parsee, had I not jumped and caught it, guiding it to the ground. So far, well and good; but now habit took charge of me: instinctively, at once, without a second thought, I hove it back in place. It was a load that probably two normally active men would find it all they could do to lift.

The Parsee gaped at me; but the worst of it was that an English doctor, passing in an auto on his way to Rawalpindi, saw the incident and, knowing the Parsee, called out to him:

"Studying anatomy? By gad, where did you find that Hercules? What is he?"

The Parsee invited him to come and look, with the result that I was faced by two inquisitors instead of one and jealousy that was racial as well as professional impelled them both to put me through another third degree. I had to rehearse my symptoms all over again, and it happened that the Englishman was one of those inquiring geniuses who take their profession extremely seriously.

It is easy enough to deceive a doctor, provided you avoid all technicalities and merely complain of agony; his anxiety to relieve you makes him take complaints for granted. He suspected me of some obscure nervous trouble, possibly due to overstrain, made me flex all my muscles, asked even what village I came from and of what disease my grandfather had died—nodded—made notes in a memorandum book—and offered me a seat in his auto to Rawalpindi, where he proposed to treat me in the hospital free of charge.

Then Grim came to the rescue with a string of lies about a doctor in the Punjab who had recommended winter in the Kashmir Valley as a cure, and in the end the English doctor gave the Parsee a lift, the two driving off toward Rawalpindi discussing nervous maladies with the argumentative enthusiasm of professional zealots.

That would not have mattered, had they not continued the discussion that evening in the *dak*—a sort of hotel midway of the pass—where there was a large, assorted company, some of whom joined in the conversation and were treated to a description of me, an account of my feat of strength and, no doubt, to some very interesting medical theories. However, we did not know that until later.

About nine o'clock the following night, in Srinagar, as we four sat around a lantern in a corner, with our backs against the wall of the warehouse behind Benjamin's agents' store discussing what might have become of the son-in-law, Mordecai, there entered a Kashmiri clerk who announced that a sahib wished to see us.

WE FELL into a panic, naturally. The word sahib is not applied exclusively to Europeans, but we jumped to the conclusion that the British authorities had learned of our movements and had sent some one to investigate. We had had to wait a day in Srinagar because of news that a police patrol was coming in along the Ladakh road, and to have met the police would have been inconvenient, to say the least of it, if only because we had unregistered firearms hidden in our packs.

After a hurried consultation we decided to receive this sahib, whoever he might be, where we sat in semi-darkness, giving as our excuse that we were travel-tired and that one of us was ill. I wrapped my head in the shawl again and leaned back in the corner.

A Tibetan entered dressed in ready-made European khaki. He announced his name as Tsang-Yang. After staring at us for a moment he sat down on our carpet uninvited, which was no good sign; and he began at once to speak to us in English, which was worse.

He was an ugly man, enormous as to height although awkwardly proportioned, with extremely bright, alert Mongolian eyes. The suit he wore hung badly on his oriental frame, having worked up at the sleeves and knees; but he spoke English very well indeed and possessed an air of confidence that spoke of long association with Europeans. We learned later that he came originally from the Province of Kam in Tibet, where nearly all the men are giants in stature.

Though he had been sufficiently ill-mannered to sit down without waiting for an invitation, and though his grin was impudent, he addressed us as "learned sirs"—a phrase implying deep respect, because Tibetans regard learning as the only royal road to virtue. The combination of insolence and politeness seemed to give the clue to his intentions. Grim whispered the word "blackmail."

Narayan Singh stared angrily, doing his best to create an inhospitable atmosphere—an art in which the Sikhs excel when so disposed—as they can do the opposite with equal grace. It was Chullunder Ghose who bore the burden of the conversation.

"Son of impertinence, what do you want?" he demanded. "Only death has the right to interrupt four worthy men at prayer."

"Pray on," said the Tibetan. "I will wait."

Chullunder Ghose snorted.

"Sit on a dung-hill and smell roses! The Lords of life to whom we offer meditation prefer thought unpolluted by diabolism! Make your interruption and go swiftly!"

"I was recently in jail," said the Tibetan, as if he thought the boast should recommend him.

"I could have guessed it," said Chullunder Ghose.

"In jail I met Tsang-Mondrong," said our visitor. "Seven days after he entered the jail, I left it, and with him I made a bargain that I should find you as soon as might be and should follow you with all speed. I learned you were at Benjamin the Jew's in Delhi. Thence I traced you to Rawalpindi, where a letter from Benjamin overtook you, warning you against me. But I read the letter before you received it. At Rawalpindi I lost sight of you, because you were rather clever in spreading rumors that you were turning south again. But we have a saying: 'When in doubt, turn northward,' so I took the road to Srinagar, though I despaired of finding you."

"Despair was not mutual. You give us bellyache," Chullunder Ghose assured him.

"But at the *dak*, where I sat in shadow close to the veranda, I overheard men speaking of a very strong Kashmiri, suffering from an affliction of the mouth that interfered with speech. One of Benjamin's assistants having spoken to me of the strength of him whose skin was stained—how he lifted the bales in the store and took his amusement wrestling with the Sikh, whom he always defeated easily—I hoped again. I knew that one who spoke Kashmiri badly might pretend he could not speak at all. I followed. I am here."

"And where do you go from here? You have permission to go swiftly," said Chullunder Ghose.

"I go where you go," the Tibetan answered.

He spoke naïvely. Nine times out of ten when a Tibetan tells you frankly he will go with you it is safe to presume he is friendly and dependable. The tenth time it would be wiser to trust a snake.

Narayan Singh spoke suddenly.

"What were you in jail for?" he demanded.

"Nothing," the man answered. "A policeman lied about me, saying I was fighting in the street, whereas I merely looked on. Why should I fight in the street, and with whom? I have never fought in the street in all my life."

Chullunder Ghose leaned toward him, pointing with two fingers at his eyes:

"I, too, am liar when it suits me!" he remarked. "Where did you learn English?"

"At mission-school, Darjiling."

"Where did you get that scar on your cheek-bone? Also from missionary? What were you formerly? Monk?"

The Tibetan nodded, Regretting the admission, he began, too late, to shake his head. Chullunder Ghose mocked him:

"BEING monk, you never fought in streets of Lhassa? Not at festival of New Year, when monks have charge of city and all shop-keepers shut doors and windows for fear of them? You were expelled from

Lhassa! You ran away to escape flogging or execution!"

"No," said the Tibetan. "I left the Drepung monastery of my own accord. I wished to learn foreign knowledge. My superior in the monastery had put me to a great shame—I, who did nothing to deserve it. I was beaten. This mark on my cheek is from the whip they used."

"Save and except that it is the mark of a knife-wound that is a very probable story!" said Chullunder Ghose. "You left that monastery in disgrace, running away without kissing the abbott good-by or taking anything except the monastery money! Nevertheless, when Tsang-Mondrong, who is paid agent in confidence of Tibetan authorities, finds you in jail, he trusts you! You are not paid agent of Tibetan Government? I bet you are! I think you learned English in Pekin, China. I think that you were formerly Tibetan spy of Chinese Government, until the Chinese were defeated and no longer paid you stipulated sum per month. I think now you would like to return to Tibet, because you are homesick for your gruesome wilderness—and you think we are on our way to Tibet—and you hope to reestablish yourself by betraying us after you shall have stolen from us all you can lay your hands on. Is it not so?"

"I am sure you will not go to Tibet until the spring, because the snow is in the passes," the man answered. "But I think you will go then, because a man named Rait is there already, and he wrote a letter to that one"—he pointed at me—"which you yourself delivered."

"So you would like to come with us, in the hope of finding Rait sahib? Is that it?"

"If you go to Tibet, I go with you!" Tsang-Yang answered.

I abandoned my rôle of sick man then and took a hand in the discussion, not exactly figuratively; took him by the neck, flung him into the corner behind me and sat on him. Narayan Singh took one of his arms and twisted it, but there was no need; his head had hit the wall. Grim stuffed a piece of sacking in his mouth and Chullunder Ghose bound the gag in place with long strips of calico.

It was a simple, swift solution of the difficulty for the moment, but we did not accomplish it without a certain amount of noise and for several minutes we waited to see whether the disturbance had attracted attention from the front part of the store.

No one came, but that was no proof we were not being quietly observed through some crack in the partition; and though it was likely we could trust Benjamin's Kashmiri agents up to a certain point, it would be foolish as well as unfair to expect them to run grave risks with the authorities on our account.

Chullunder Ghose, with a fat man's sense of humor, did his best to make our flesh creep:

"What now to do with dead Tibetan?" he remarked.

But, he was not dead; I could feel him breathing.

"The brute must come with us," said Grim. "If we turn him loose the very least he'll do will be to betray Benjamin."

"And up yonder in high mountains there are many slippery places!" said Chullunder Ghose.

"Let us go," said Narayan Singh, getting up and beginning to remove the sacks that we had heaped on the prisoner, who lay still.

"Search him first!" Chullunder Ghose advised. "First aid to restoring consciousness is to turn all pockets inside out and feel for money between skin and undershirt!"

It was Grim's quick fingers that removed a leather wallet from a bandage over the man's ribs. We covered up our prisoner with sacks again and sat down in a circle to examine the find by the light of our smoky lantern.

On the outside of the wallet were the letters E. R. stamped in gold. Inside it was Rait's passport, some receipts, a woman's letter, and a photograph of me!

The receipts were all for trade-goods—matches, dyes, cooking utensils and silk that Rait had bought to take with him to Tibet in his guise of merchant; they were made out to bearer and marked "goods to be delivered at place agreed on road to Gyangste."

THE letter from the woman had no right to be in anybody's wallet. She was an author with an international reputation, who had learned of Rait's intention to visit Tibet and was trying to dissuade him. Her passionate appeals to him to come to Europe and "continue a soul-communion begun in

Simla" would have been burned by any decent fellow instantly, to prevent their falling into strangers' hands.

That letter in Rait's wallet was a searchlight thrown on his character. It scandalized Chullunder Ghose, who is no sufferer from squeamishness, but having been Rait's partner for a number of years I had understood something of his cynicism. I was about to burn the letter when Grim snatched it from me.

"Didn't you see the use he's made of it?" he asked.

He held it close up to the lantern. Some of the words had been faintly underscored with an instrument—perhaps a thumb-nail—that had scratched the paper without penetrating deep. Grim—hunting for the underscored words—read the message:

"Buried—and—spot—marked—to—satisfy—you—this—is—right—direction—Look—out—for—indications—of—turning—toward—West—this—side—of—Lhassa— Remember—it—is—hard—to look—into—fierce—light—which—casts—black—shadow—consequently—don't—expect—important—discovery—without—nerve-racking—experiences— This—fool's—letter—doesn't—deserve—to—be—put—to—such—good—use—but—and here a whole sentence was underscored—the very universe seems to be built on a foundation of broken hearts, so come at once, come quickly!"

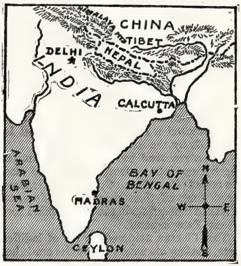
Grim wrote down the message and I burned the woman's letter. It was plain enough that Rait had left Lhassa, had taken some trail leading westward, and had left that wallet buried by the road to mark the trail for me. But two things were not at all clear: Why had he carried with him into Tibet documents that, if found on his person, would convict him of being a foreigner? And how had the wallet come into Tsang-Yang's possession?

There was nothing to be learned just then from the Tibetan, who was still unconscious from the contact with his head against the wall. We decided not to let him know that we had found the wallet, but to wait and see what happened.

Meanwhile, what to do with him? There was a back-door to the warehouse and, near that, a barrow with bicycle wheels and a canvas cover, not unlike an ambulance. We tied him securely on that, arranging our lighter baggage around and over him, almost breaking down the frail conveyance, which Narayan Singh and I pushed out through the back-door, while Grim and Chullunder Ghose went to make excuses to our hosts, who turned out to be only too glad to be rid of us, barrow and all.

They explained to Grim exactly where the ponies were that had been bought on Benjamin's instruction, and promised to send our heavier loads next day by porter to an empty storehouse in a ravine beside the road to Ladakh, where we could re-pack them if we wished, and load the ponies at our leisure, without any one's being the wiser.

It was a cold, black night. The north wind, whistling from the Karakorum Mountains, seemed to make the bright stars shiver and reduce themselves to pinpoints. The River Jhelum, flowing through the midst of Srinagar, lapped noisily against the bridge-piles. There was a lonely feeling—a foretaste of winter—sharpened by a few bright lights from the hotels, where the last of the summer visitors were making the most of the season's end and probably dreading the hot plains of India as much as we dreaded the snow-bound passes leading into Tibet.



But we were off. And though we sneaked into the night like criminals, the thought was comforting that we had caught the only man likely to betray us. When he recovered consciousness he would be a nuisance and a danger, but not nearly as dangerous as he would have been had we left him behind without knowing he was on our trail.

CHAPTER V

TSANG-MONDRONG

WE TRUNDLED the barrow all night along the road that follows the Sind Valley, startled by shadows that leaped at us out of the darkness, and by night-prowling scavenger dogs that yelped and ran. It does not take much to scare people who are on the run, and Rait's mysterious warning of nerve-racking experiences had filled us with foreboding.

Long before morning our prisoner came to his senses and announced the fact by shouting at the top of his lungs, but Narayan Singh prodded his ribs a few times with a sharp stick and he took the hint, lying still after that until we came to a halt at daybreak.

That Ladakh Road is used by countless peasants, some of whom would have been sure to take exception to the rubber-tired barrow. It was neither in keeping with our guise of honest merchants nor in any way suited to the nature of the road ahead. We looked like prosperous men, who could well afford horses or porters, but we were likely to be reported as thieves escaping with our loot unless we got rid of the barrow and invented a likely story to account for our loads by the wayside.

So we removed the wheels and dumped the barrow into a stream, where the reeds concealed it. Then Grim and Narayan Singh took off their shoes and made scores of naked foot-prints in the dust, while I took Tsang-Yang in hand.

The Tibetan assumed an air of indifference, chafing his wrists where the cords had hurt him a bit and obeying without comment when I told him to stand in front of me. Not knowing much about Tibetans yet, I mistook the attitude for one of sullen, watchful waiting.

"You think you will appeal to the first passers-by," I said. "If so, we will accuse you of being a bandit—one of many who attacked us in the night and made our porters run away. We will say we captured you by hitting you over the head, showing the bruise on your head in proof of it. And if you deny it, we will add that the bandits ran off with our women, and the first peasants who come along will beat you half to death. Do you like the prospect?"

"What do you wish?" he asked, turning up his thumbs.

Suddenly he put his tongue out at me—a slobbery, big tongue that looked almost too big to withdraw. I was minded to hit him to teach him manners, but Chullunder Ghose came to his rescue, having watched with deliberate interest as he sat with his shoes off, chafing tired feet.

"Don't hit! That is Tibetan abjectness of white flag, belly upward, all four feet in air! He is law of heredity functioning! He is product of bad food, blizzards and religion!"

The babu was right. Veneer had peeled off. The Tibetan had relapsed into the savagery of the State of Kam, where nature in the raw and superstition in authority present men with facts they must accept and suffer under or else perish. The monastery monks might whip him again now without risk of reprisals. Rightly handled he was ready to submit to anything—although how long the relapse would last might be another question.

"Remember!" I warned. "If I catch you speaking to a stranger, I will simply say you are a woman-stealer, and you will be beaten to death."

It was Grim's suggestion that I should bully him while Chullunder Ghose should pretend to pity him: a sort of third degree that might induce him to confide in one of us.

So I made him gather fuel for our breakfast fire, calling him a dog who would eat at each meal twice what his labor was worth. Chullunder Ghose, outpouring mock compassion, called him "little Kamkin" and inquired whether he liked chupatties burned on both sides or only on one.

Chullunder Ghose believes himself an expert at chupattie making, but as we did not want to unpack the loads, the only tools he had were a spoon and an upturned biscuit-tin, whose solder melted, letting the flat cakes fall into the smoky fire.

However, we had eaten after a fashion when the first of the peasantry came in sight—sixteen or eighteen men in single file on their way to the magistrate's court in Srinagar. The five in the lead were mounted on half-starved ponies; they were principals in a law-suit and continued on their way, refusing to have anything to do with us, but the others were merely going as spectators and were eager to stop and listen to any form of entertainment. We told them how our porters had all run away and left us when we were attacked by bandits in the night.

They believed the story, because there were the marks of many foot-prints in the road and because the police patrol was known to have returned to Srinagar the day before, thus officially opening the season for highway robberies. When we suggested they should carry our loads toward the nearest village they refused point blank—then sat down to discuss the matter, bent on discovering exactly how grave our predicament might be before setting a price on their services.

We were utterly at their mercy. If we had offered them a high price we might have aroused suspicion that we were fugitives from justice; yet we did not dare let them proceed on their way and tell all Srinagar about us.

However, at the end of fifteen minutes' talking it occurred to one of them to ask exactly who we were, and he began with me—I suppose, because I was the biggest. That gave Chullunder Ghose his opportunity.

He described me as a great physician, gifted with powers of divination and possessed of infallible remedies for curing barrenness of acres, camels, cows and wives.

"He is puller of teeth, being known as Painless Parker—which is Greek word meaning altruist. He is setter of bones. He is increaser of longevity. He can make the constipated rise out of their beds so often that a pair of slippers will be worn out in one night. He cured the King of the United States of leprosy. The Crown Prince of Switzerland conferred on him the Order of the Garter for healing him of so-called republican tendencies, which is a terrible disease. The Emperor of France offered him his only daughter in marriage, on condition he should live in the Louvre, which honor he refused, however, on account of insufficiency of palace furnishings. He is now on his way to cure the gall-stones of a chieftain of Ladakh by means of magic poultices."

Before he had finished his nonsense every one of them felt symptoms of disease, which, after silent diagnosis and much frowning, I proceeded to treat with equally imaginary remedies produced out of an ancient Chinese tea-chest Benjamin had given me. There were Chinese pictures on the inside of the lid, quite easily mistaken for a gallery of Buddhist saints, and although those villagers were far from being Buddhists, they were none-the-less impressed with a sense of my sanctity and mistook the taste of Worcestershire sauce for the semi-divine flavor of Tantrist drugs.

GRIM made them avert their eyes in silence while I mixed the stuff with whisky and Narayan Singh chanted a mantra, of which neither he nor I nor any one could guess the meaning.

Then, when they had all been dosed, and had rubbed their stomachs and felt wonderfully better, they bethought them of their village headman, who had abscess of the jaw. No sooner thought than acted on. They seized our loads—except the biggest, naturally, which Grim compelled Tsang-Yang to carry to prevent his civilized veneer from filming over him again—and hurried toward their village, chattering like children, with their heads too full of my wizardry to remember our tale of the midnight hold-up. Even if they had remembered it, the danger of their telling tales about us for the present had entirely vanished. I was their treasure trove, and they proposed to keep me to themselves until my usefulness was squeezed out to the last drop; tales of a mighty magician who could heal all manner of disease were likely, they knew well, to bring too swift investigation from a health department whose officials believed in such heresies as cleanliness and vaccination—and who were known to be extremely jealous of genuine thaumaturgists.

So, though we passed at least two hundred peasants on our way, their questions were not answered, and the merely mild interest we aroused was likely to be forgotten long before those dawdlers reached the shops of Srinagar.

At the end of four or five hours' walking we reached a filthy village, where the headman lay groaning in agony in a dark stone hut, under a thatched roof where the rats were nesting; and I had to operate on him at once before a breathless audience that filled the room. I would have funked it if Grim had not been there, but Grim is afraid of nothing except fear itself, and he stood at my elbow, urging me in whispers.

"He'll die anyhow if you don't do something. His whole system is being poisoned by the abscess. You may kill him, or it may be your lucky day—and his! Go to it."

Whoever has managed mining camps a hundred miles or so from rail-head has incidentally performed all manner of minor operations, as often as not without any proper instrument or a drum-and-fife band to drown the victim's yells. So I was not quite green to the business. Benjamin had supplied me with the very latest thing in forceps.

At the risk of poisoning the man I drowned his pain with half a syringeful of local anæsthetic, gave that time to work, and pulled out all the teeth on one side of his head. One molar broke and I had to fish for it, but when I had done the poor wretch was alive and grateful; he offered me three chickens and a month-old calf —born too late in the year to be likely to live— and beat his only son on the shoulders with a carved Kashmiri stool for not making me a suitable obeisance.

That was naturally not the whole of it; success involves responsibility, and Chullunder Ghose had advertised me much too well. My next patient was a woman with shriveled breasts, whose son had died a quarter of a century ago, and who now demanded an elixir to renew her youth. I gave her a full dose of Worcestershire sauce and whisky, and Grim told her to eat two handfuls of sugar by the light of the next new moon, which she must see over her left shoulder without thinking of her age; if she dared to think about her age the remedy would fail, but otherwise she would have twins within twelve months.

She might have had twins there and then, so far as my standing went in that community. Men who would have dreaded a genuine doctor's visit more than the plague began to try to force presents on me and to beg for stuff that should make their wives bear children. I was busy lancing boils and dosing more or less imaginary stomachaches all afternoon, and when night came there was nothing for it but to accept the headman's hospitality.

By that time I would have given almost anything for the privilege of speech, and that infernal rascal Chullunder Ghose, enjoying my predicament, did his utmost to make me miserable, telling tales about me that would have made Munchausen blush. He explained my silence by saying that my power to heal disease depended on it; a great hermit had conferred the magic on me, on condition that I should not speak to anyone for thirty years, of which nineteen had still to run. Tsang-Yang, he said, had to be silent, too, because he was my *chela*, who was going to be taught how to pull teeth after ten years' apprenticeship, provided he did not speak one word in all that time; for each word that he should speak until then, one month would be added to his sentence.

The villagers mischievously did their best to ruin Tsang-Yang's prospects by inducing him to talk, but Narayan Singh sat next to him, growling threats of mayhem into his ear. The Tibetan was still under the spell of that half religious, half climatic consciousness of being licked and though, as we discovered later, he had another motive for submitting to us, it was the Sikh's threats just then that appealed to his imagition and made him obedient.

We slept in the headman's bug-infested hut—an honor that we only conferred on him after he had promised to supply us with as many porters as we needed. We had hard work to keep him to his word, because he wanted us to stay and hold another clinic, for the honor it would do his village, but we got off, about two hours after dawn, behind a string of men who sadly lacked enthusiasm now that they knew there was nothing more to be had from us.

They dawdled, and delay was likely to prove fatal, since a chill wind from the North-West hinted at falling snow and, far ahead of us, we caught rare glimpses of the mountain peaks through a curtain of grayish cloud. It might mean death if storms should overtake us in the Zogi-la, but if we could hurry through the pass before the first heavy storm the drifts would close the door to India behind us.

SO WHERE the road branched off toward a village where the ponies were supposed to be waiting we divided forces, paying the porters and sending them home. We left Chullunder Ghose, who was foot-sore, along with Narayan Singh to guard the loads, while Grim and I went off with Tsang-Yang to find the ponies. The trail wound around the shoulders of hills and crossed valley bottoms where the brooks spread into swamps, so we lost the way twice, but arrived at the village, dog-tired, shortly after sunset—only to discover that the villagers had mistaken Benjamin's messenger's instructions and had sent all twelve animals to await us at a village half a day's march farther along the Ladakh Road.

After a lot of arguing the headman agreed to send for the ponies and have them brought back along the road toward us the following morning; then we returned, along a trail that had been difficult to find by daylight. Well for us that we had brought Tsang-Yang! Tibetans all see marvelously in the dark. His hardly human-looking eyes picked out the landmarks he had seen only once, from the opposite direction; and his awkward-looking legs, that looked slouchy and weak when the going was moderately level, swung along now over rise and descent at a speed that was nearly too much for us.

We began to feel faith in the man, he took such pains to guide us and did it so cheerfully. Grim has a way of gaining the affection of most savages, less by what he says and does, than by being what he is; they simply take to him. Tsang-yang had begun to behave toward him like a stray dog adopting a master, and I believe that if nothing unexpected had happened to corrupt him again he might have turned into a faithful servant.

But, the unexpected did happen. Near midnight Tsang-Yang came to a stand at last between two rounded boulders, and Grim and I felt sure he had lost the way, neither of us recognizing the looming cliff on one side nor the echoing gorge along which the wind went whistling beneath us. But when we began to speak Tsang-Yang gestured for silence, and presently we heard the unmistakable voice of Chullunder Ghose.

"Am apogee of ignorance— Not knowing who I am, can't say— Have no proof of identity— Have lost myself— This man beside me is the devil— No need, therefore, to go to him; you have come to him— You may remain here and freeze, same as me— Recognize you?— I no longer recognize myself— Am mystically minded meditator much confused by philosophic thinking—otherwise, why do you think I would sit here in chilly wind on heap of merchandise, like Krishna on a dunghill?"

I crept through the dark and Grim followed. Presently I made out our fat babu's shape, huddled in a shawl, with Narayan Singh sitting bolt-upright beside him. Facing them a man stood leaning on what seemed to be a rifle with an old-fashioned three-edged bayonet fixed; he looked like a policeman in a khaki uniform. To be skewered by a bayonet is no amusement, so I crawled in the darkest shadow until I reached Narayan Singh and whispered to him from behind.

Chullunder Ghose gulped at the sound of my voice—almost screamed with terror; but Narayan Singh, without looking at me, shot forward like a statue come to life and rushed the man in khaki, who raised his weapon to defend himself. It turned out to be only a long stick. In another second he was down under Narayan Singh with a knee on his chest and his right arm twisted into helplessness.

I struck a match and held it close to him. He was Tsang-Mondrong, whom we thought we had left safely cared for in the Delhi jail!

Tsang-Yang, mortally afraid and sheltering himself behind our pile of loads, urged us to kill him at once.

"He is a ——! He will tell you lies! He will betray you!"

But the worst of it was that Tsang-Yang's semi-western air of independence was beginning to return. He was afraid, but fear had made a man of him again. He even threatened us. He swore that unless we should kill Tsang-Mondrong he would run away himself and warn the police that we were on our way to Tibet.

"Give me a weapon. You hold him, and let me kill him!" he suggested.

We stood them both in front of us and sat down with our backs against the loads. Neither man offered to try to escape; they were both too tired. Each seemed to suspect the other, and Tsang-Mondrong answered our questions readily enough at first, because he feared Tsang-Yang might answer them otherwise.

He told us he had been released from Delhi jail by the order of some visiting official who considered he had been condemned without sufficient evidence. He had started after us without an hour's delay, following clues left purposely by Tsang-Yang.

Tsang-Yang promptly denied that he had left any clues for him to follow.

"A dog he is! Like a dog he smelt the trail!"

BUT at that Tsang-Mondrong flew at him, calling him an eight-faced liar, and we had to separate them, fighting like a pair of windmills.

As soon as he recovered breath Tsang-Mondrong admitted frankly that he had not expected to overtake us much this side of Leh, in Ladakh, and added that he had come slowly because he was sick from the food they had given him in jail. He did not turn uncommunicative until I asked him whether he had known Rait. He denied it, and his expression and attitude changed instantly.

"No, you didn't know him!" said Chullunder Ghose. "Like ——-fool you thought you could steal from him! But he having kicked you in belly, I bet you remember him!"

"How did you come to possess Rait's wallet?" Grim demanded.

Tsang-Mondrong promptly denied ever having seen the wallet. Tsang-Yang, probably imagining that he himself had lost it in the scuffle in the warehouse at Srinagar, and moved by some spirit of lying for the sake of lying, swore that he, too, knew nothing about any wallet; whereat Tsang-Mondrong began cursing him in voluble Tibetan and we had to separate them once more.

Narayan Singh went and stood between them to keep them from flying at each other's throats, and Tsang-Mondrong swore there was a lot of money in the wallet, the amount increasing as conviction grew that Tsang-Yang had made away with it. The transfer of possession, it appeared, had been a very simple matter; the jail officials had taken it from Tsang-Mondrong, who claimed that it was not his property, so after a perfunctory examination it was sealed and, at Tsang-Mondrong's request, given to Tsang-Yang on his release, a week later, for delivery to its rightful owner. However, Tsang-Mondrong refused to say why he had wished Tsang-Yang to have it.

But by that time Tsang-Yang was in a white-hot rage; the other had struck him under the breast-bone besides calling him a thief; the mixture of agony and indignation drove the whole story of the wallet spluttering out of him.

"Tsang-Mondrong is a snake whose liver crawls with lice! He followed Rait sahib across the border, beyond Gyangtse, to the land of U.[*] There he approached him, offering his services as guide. The *chiling*[†] knowing who he was, could not help but accept, since otherwise Tsang-Mondrong would have instantly betrayed him. All this was told me in the jail in Delhi, by Tsang-Mondrong, who is an eater of eggs and a drinker of milk and a tobacco-smoker[‡] among other vices that he has!

"Tsang-Mondrong said the *chiling* Rait made two or three attempts to poison him. But it was doubtless he who tried to poison the *chiling*. Watching, he saw the *chiling* bury a wallet under a little pyramid of stones on which all passers-by hang prayer-flags—such a cairn as exist in Tibet by the hundred thousand. Thereafter the *chiling* set a mark on the side of the cliff, and beneath that, under a flat stone, he put a written message, saying where the wallet had been hidden.

"The *chiling*, who was cunningly disguised, went forward with his more than twelve mule-loads of matches and silk and indigo; and that day, and the next, Tsang-Mondrong—whose soul shall inhabit a she-dog in his next life—had no opportunity to turn back and dig up the wallet; but on the third night thereafter he did so. All this he told me in the Delhi jail. But I have never seen the wallet."

In the pause that followed that profound misstatement Chullunder Ghose tried to break Tsang-Mondrong's silence.

"Son of purity and virtue," he demanded, "why in the name of Chenresi and all your buttery deities did you not at once betray the *chiling*, seeing that you now had proof against him?"

But before Tsang-Mondrong could answer, Tsang-Yang resumed the tale:

"He could not! The *chiling* had vanished as if the earth had swallowed him! Tsang-Mondrong, whose brains are a chicken's entrails, hoped to extort much money before finally betraying him. But the *chiling* had vanished, and Tsang-Mondrong said to himself, 'If I tell such a tale I shall be mocked and beaten, for who would believe it?' But now that he had the wallet he understood that one should follow before long, for whom the *chiling* had left that message; so he returned to Darjiling to act guide for officers on shooting expeditions, meaning to keep his eyes wide open. All these things he told me in the jail, but I have never seen the wallet, which, moreover, had no money in it. He is a black-souled fiend's offspring and a liar, whose oath is no good. I swear I have not seen the wallet."

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[*] A province in Tibet. [†] Foreigner. i. e. Rait.
[‡] Three unspeakable offenses against Tibetan custom.

"Why, then, did he send you in pursuit of us?" I asked.

"Because he wished to follow you, and because to betray you on this side of the border would not be so profitable as on the other side, where he can first extort money from you by threats, and then arrange to have you robbed, before betraying you to the authorities."

"Sin-scorning pilgrim of the inner way—adorer of Chenresi, tell me," said Chullunder Ghose, "why did Tsang-Mondrong give the wallet to you?"

TSANG-YANG was about to deny again that he had ever seen the wallet, but Tsang-Mondrong found speech at last and burst out with denunciation:

"Why? Because this Tsang-Yang is a renegade monk, who knows too much about the insides of religion to be honest! He is a driver of hard bargains. May his soul be separated from his body! He refused to have anything to do with you or me unless I gave him the wallet as security."

"And do you still propose to come with us?" Grim asked him.

The man nodded.

"Why?"

"Because I must find the *chiling* Rait. And because I know all about you, Jimgrim. You, too, are looking for that *chiling*, and men say you always succeed in everything you attempt."

"Why do you want to find the *chiling* Rait?"

"I want to see his soul torn from his body!"

"He is not known as Rait in Tibet, is he?"

"No, but as Lung-Tok."

"How do you suppose he disappeared? Do you think he was murdered?"

"Not he! That *chiling ragyaba** is far too cunning! He buried the wallet with no other purpose than to get rid of me—may dogs devour him! It is clear to me now that he let me see him bury it, well knowing I would return and dig it up, but he took care I shouldn't slip away from him to do that until the third night following. So by the time I had gone all that long way back to get the wallet, and had turned again to follow him, he had had plenty of time to disappear; but how he disappeared, with all those mules and three servants, I know not. And now another thing is clear to me; that *chiling* is a crafty reader of men's minds! He knew that having lost him I would return to Darjiling and watch for whoever should follow; thus he thought that the wallet might probably fall into your hands, learned sirs, he thinking I would behave to you as I did to him, offering my services."

"You may go. You may go and betray us," said Grim. "One word from you to the authorities in Srinagar and they'll send mounted men to bring us back."

"Nay, Jimgrim! You are more cunning than the *chiling* Rait! You would give me the slip just as he did! I come with you. If you pay me well enough I will be your friend and not betray you."

"Rait, you say, calls himself Lung-Tok. What if I find him?" Grim asked.

Tsang-Mondrong's hideous face transformed itself into a horror that even the darkness could not hide. It was hatred, naked and determined. But he made no answer.

TO BE CONTINUED

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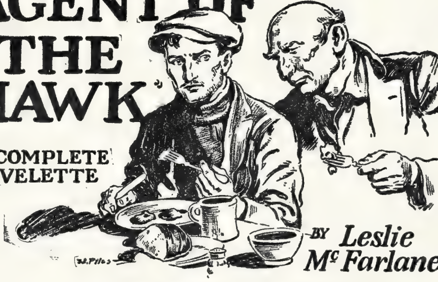
* The foulest word of abuse in the Tibetan language. *Ragyabas* are outcasts who live in unspeakable filth on the outskirts of towns. It is they who have the disposition of all corpses.

AGENT OF THE HAWK

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE



BY Leslie McFarlane

Author of "In the Blizzard," "The King of Matabanick," etc.

I

STEPHEN DURANT trudged down the main street of the little mining town, facing a bitter gale that flung sheets of snow, like furling banners, down the road. It was January, and darkness had fallen. Street lights glowed yellow and bleary through the rising storm. Few people were abroad, and these scurried darkly by, with faces hidden in upturned coat collars, shoulders bowed to the blast. It was intensely cold.

Durant had no overcoat. His cap was pulled down low over his aching forehead; it was as if a steel band were pressing about his head. His chin was plunged into the collar of the heavy sweater under his suit-coat. His hands were in his pockets for greater warmth than thin gloves afforded them, and he was bowed forward in that resigned slouch peculiar to hungry and penniless men.

His face, revealed for a moment in the light of a frosted shop window, was thin and pale. He had been without work or prospect of work for two weeks, and had been eating accordingly. That day he had not eaten at all. Still, Durant's mouth had a mildly humorous quirk, as if he found this matter of being broke and friendless in the gold camp on a winter night more amusing than serious; but that expression was a mask, for although Durant was accustomed to taking misfortune, like good luck, just as it came, and smiled at it without rancor, griping hunger and penetrating cold were beginning to undermine his spirits.

His clothes were thin. The wind was bitter. He was weak with hunger. The chilly little fingers of panic and desperation were beginning to clutch at his heart. The lights of a Chinese restaurant shone before him, and he paused in the street for a moment, shivering and weary. Then, shrugging his shoulders as another gust of wind blew fiercely down the street, driving a swirling cloud of snow before it, snow that stung like keen needles, he opened the restaurant door and went inside.

The place was warm, and to his sensitive nostrils the heavy odors of food were overwhelming. His mouth watered, and his knees became suddenly weak. He had a confused glimpse of many roughly dressed men, sitting at white tables, the constant clatter of dishes jangled in his ears, and then, behind the counter, guardian of a cash register, he became aware of a lean, sharp-eyed Chinaman, with a long, scrawny neck above a bow tie much too large for him.

The Chinaman grinned a welcome, and then the grin vanished as Durant, instead of making his way to one of the tables, paused at the counter and leaned confidentially forward.

"Need any one to wash dishes, Charlie?" he asked, nervously. Durant wondered if this were the proper formula. It was his first experience of the kind.

The Chinaman shook his head.

"Peel potatoes, then?"

"No," replied the Chinaman, shortly. "Fo', fi' time tonight fella come ask for job like you. Ev'body hungly, no money. I give two fella job, in kitchen now. Don' need no mo!"

Then, because he was not a bad-hearted fellow, and thought he might later intercede with the proprietor, he said—

"You come back, mebbe 'bout ten o'clock, eh?"

"Just want to work for a meal," said Durant, with faint hope.

"Ten o'clock," said the Chinaman, with finality. Whereupon Durant thanked him and grinned faintly, realizing that when work is scarce and the shadow of unemployment hovers over the Northern Ontario winter, there are apt to be many applicants at restaurant kitchens. Wearily, he turned to go.

"Just a minute!"

It was a grating voice, harsh and unpleasant, but Durant turned. At a nearby table sat a man, a most peculiar fellow in appearance, who was beckoning to him.

This man had a bald head, shaggy eyebrows, and the sharpest, coldest eyes Durant had ever seen. His nose, which was hooked, was large, and out of all proportion to the rest of his features, shadowing a thin and twisted mouth. All in all, he had the aspect of an elderly, brooding hawk, aged in evil.

"Come over here and sit down," he invited.

DURANT, reflecting that hungry men must pocket their pride, went over to the table, and the hawk-like fellow did not miss the involuntary light of eagerness that came into his eyes when they fell upon the bowl of soup already before the stranger. To a passing waiter he gave a blanket order for anything Durant might care to have.

"Your treat?" asked Durant.

"Certainly. Get a square meal into you. I want to talk to you."

"Thank you," replied Durant, and proceeded to order his first square meal of the week.

He sat back in his chair.

"I'm up against it, you see," he smiled, apologetically, "or I wouldn't have to do this."

"Know how it is," rasped the stranger, abruptly, gulping a spoonful of soup. "Need a job, eh?"

"I wouldn't turn one down in a hurry."

"No jobs around here," the hawk-like man told him, with finality. "Mines are full up."

"I know it."

The stranger nodded, his sharp eyes fixed on the younger man.

"Up against it, eh? Broke? No job? Don't know anybody?"

"That sums it up."

"What're you going to do about it?"

Durant shrugged.

"Trust to luck."

"If luck brought you a good job, you'd take it?"

He bowed to the soup as he spoke. Durant looked at the smooth, bald head, gleaming in the light, at the shaggy brows, at the ridge of the great nose, and again he was struck by this curious human resemblance to a hawk.

"I'd grab it."

The stranger looked up and stared at him in a disconcerting way.

"Keep a close tongue in your head?" he asked.

"I hope so."

"Known in town?"

"Only landed here today."

"Ever been in trouble?"

"What kind of trouble?"

"With the police."

"No. Why do you ask that?"

"Just wanted to make sure."

Durant's soup arrived at that moment, and he picked up the spoon, striving to conceal his eagerness, as the fragrant odor rose from the bowl.

"I have a job," said the stranger abruptly, in his harsh voice, "for a trustworthy man." His tones were lowered. "I'll pay him just what he's worth to me, and if he's the right kind of man that'll be plenty. How 'bout it? It's yours if you want it."

"What kind of a job?"

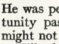
"You'll see when you start. Take it or leave it."

Durant looked at the bald man carefully. His abrupt manner, his rasping voice, his staccato questions, particularly his sinister appearance, did not dispose one in his favor, but still, he had been kind, and Durant was more than grateful for the meal. He could not afford to be particular. He was penniless, and if he let this opportunity pass, indefinite though it was, he might not soon have another.

"I'll take it."

"Good."

No more was said. Durant enjoyed his meal to the utmost, and when finally he rose and accompanied the stranger from the place, warm and well fed, he decided that the North was a fine place after all, and berated himself for even hesitating to accept the generous offer of this queer benefactor.



THEY strode along the street, the wind at their backs, and when Durant felt its cutting force he was glad that he was not facing the night without some guarantee of shelter, and his gratitude to the stranger increased. The other man wore a long, flapping, black overcoat, and a black sealskin hat, which added to his already imposing height. And as he paced swiftly along, his head pushed forward, his eyes taking in everything about him, he looked more and more like a rakish bird of prey in human guise. He said nothing, and Durant hurried along in equal silence, until finally, after turning off the main thoroughfare, into one of the darker sidestreets of the camp, they came to two small cottages, identical in appearance, side by side.

The stranger led the way up to one of these. Both cottages were in complete darkness. The hawk-like man unlocked the door and entered, switching on a light, then beckoned Durant to follow.

The place was sparsely furnished, but the stranger led the way into a small kitchen, without giving Durant an opportunity of taking more than a glance around. There, he motioned the young man to a chair, and then, without taking off his hat and coat, stood in the center of the room, staring at Durant so intently that he finally grew restless under the scrutiny.

"Well?" he asked.

The stranger paid no attention, but studied him mercilessly. Durant returned his stare, good-humoredly enough, and resolved to bear it without further comment.

The silence was suddenly broken by a strange sound. It was a hollow, distant roaring, subdued in tone, that suddenly sprang up, seemingly close at hand, yet muffled in volume. It was like the heavy droning of a gigantic bee on a drowsy summer afternoon, and although Durant listened, fascinated, trying to analyze the sound, he was unable to define it. When it broke out on the stillness, the hawk-like man started, convulsively, and an expression which might have been surprize, might have been anger, crossed his face. The roaring went on. It sounded curiously like a train passing through a tunnel, with a certain quality of distance, yet seeming at the same time somehow close at hand. The tall man turned suddenly away, and went over to the stove.

"I guess you'll do," he rasped. "I want you to understand that this job demands absolute secrecy."

"Yes."

"Do you know where Poland is—in town?"

Durant shook his head.

The stranger tapped suddenly, sharply, on the stove with the poker. It was an action with no particular significance, yet Durant could not rid himself of a feeling that in this instance it had a purpose, although for what reason, he could not imagine.

"It's where the hunkies live," continued the stranger, "the muckers—the mine workers. Anybody'll be able to direct you. I want you to go to Dupuk's place down there, and get a parcel he will have ready for you."

Durant became aware that the strange roaring was quickly dying down. It faded away altogether. The tall man came over from the stove.

"A parcel," Durant said. And then, hesitantly, "I'm grateful to you for the meal, and for offering me a job, but if it's anything crooked—"

The hawk-like man regarded him, indignantly.

"Do I look like a crook?"

Durant was disposed to remark that the man's looks were none too provocative of confidence, but the man's indignation was so sincere that Durant shook his head, and hastily explained that he merely wanted to protect himself. It was rather unusual—

"Don't be suspicious of me," urged the hawk-like man. "I'm not asking you to do anything dishonest. I don't blame you for thinking there may be something wrong, when I give you an assignment like that, without explanation. Do you know anything about mining?"

"Nothing."

"There are a great many things done in the mining game that it doesn't pay to spread broadcast. Property deals, and the like—quite legitimate—but demanding secrecy, you understand? My business is like that. Later on I will explain more fully, but right now I need that parcel from Dupuk's place."

Durant nodded, partly reassured. He realized that if he turned down this proposition, mysterious though it seemed, he was facing a night in the gold camp, penniless and friendless, and he had a vivid recollection of the misery of the past two nights. The stranger's words convinced him that he was simply being asked to act as go-between in some mining camp "inside stuff."

"It's all right with me," he said. "How about money?"

"You'll get five dollars for the trip. There'll be others. At least one a day, and usually more. Do you think you can find your way back here?"

Durant nodded, and the tall man gave him a sealed envelope which was to be delivered, he said, to Dupuk. Noticing that he had no overcoat, the stranger went into a side room and returned with a worn but heavy coat, a trifle large, which Durant donned gratefully.

At the door, he hesitated.

"Since you're going to be my boss, perhaps you might tell me your name," he suggested.

The stranger, standing under the light, his hands in his pockets, his head cocked to one side, his thin lips twisted in a faint smile, regarded him silently for a moment.

"What's yours?" he asked, abruptly.

"Steve Durant."

"All right, Durant. Mine doesn't matter. When you go to Dupuk's tell him you come from the chief. Be on your way."

"Chief," thought Durant. "Hawk would be a better nickname. I'm the agent of the Hawk. The stranger burst into sudden, rasping laughter, and as Durant closed the door, puzzled beyond measure, he thought he heard again the distant roaring which had first surprized him when he entered the house. The muffled droning seemed to rise from the very depths of the earth, and then the door closed, and the roaring died away.

II

DUPUK'S place he found finally in a narrow crooked street, on either side of which long ramshackle frame-houses faced each other in two impassive rows. It was in the cheap lodging-house section of the camp, where lived the muckers, the laborers, the drudges of the mines. Lights gleamed feebly from the bleary windows; occasionally he could hear scraps of music from within the sprawling houses, the wheedling of a violin, the wheezing of a mouth-organ.

Dupuk's differed little from any of the others. There was a long, low living-room, blue with smoke, and in the haze he could see coarse, swarthy men lounging about. Some sat at a table, playing cards; a few argued in fierce voices in a corner; one sat apart laboriously endeavoring to mend a broken boot. Bare, brawny arms, hairy chests, dull, stupid faces—the place was fetid with heavy human odors and the smell of food. A fat, red-cheeked woman whose heavy breasts shook beneath a violent yellow blouse, waddled forward, brushing a strand of hair from her forehead with pudgy fingers.

"Well?" she asked, mechanically.

"Mr. Dupuk?"

She regarded him cunningly.

"He not 'ere."

Durant knew she lied.

"I'm from the chief," he said.

Hastily she wiped her fat hands on her apron, and turned away, indicating that he was to follow her. Durant noticed that two or three of the bewhiskered men near-by had looked up at the mention of the chief, and saw that a curious expression of respect crept into their countenances.

He followed the fat woman through the crowded rooms out into a kitchen where half a dozen ragged children, a slatternly servant girl and an unexplained man with huge mustaches shared the limited space with a huge stove and a table. She cleared her way, the children tumbling out of the road; opened a door and indicated a narrow, ill-lighted staircase.

"Up there," she told him, and Durant ascended.

He went up the stairs and found himself in a large room, where five men sat at a table playing cards. They looked about, curiously, as he emerged from the stairway. One, an enormous figure in a blue shirt, a man with close-cropped hair, a putty-like face, and the shoulders of a blacksmith, dropped his cards and got up. The others sat where they were and stared. There was a rat-like little fellow with wispy mustaches; a huge, placid Finn who blinked humorously at Durant; a flashy, fat young Russian with a pimpled face, and a mournful man with a black beard. All gazed at Durant in silence.

"Want to see me?" asked the man in the blue shirt, finally.

"Mr. Dupuk?"

"Yuh."

Durant handed over the envelope. He saw Dupuk open it, remove some money, which caused a stir among the quartet at the table, and then read a note which accompanied the bills. He tore up the note, and turned to his companions.

"He's from the chief," he announced, indicating Durant.

There was a further stir. The rat-like fellow rose abruptly from his chair.

"You tell heem then," he urged. "You tell heem. He's got for to tell us—"

"Shut up!" grunted the young Russian, contemptuously.

Then he looked at Dupuk for approval. The big man ignored them all, but turned gently to Durant.

"You his new man, eh?"

"Yes."

"How long you been on the job?"

"That's my business," replied Durant, curtly. "He sent me for a parcel."

Dupuk looked at him silently for a while. Then he went over to a cupboard, and returned with a small sack, which he swung idly in his massive hand.

"You tell the chief," he said, slowly, "that we—"

Here he was interrupted by the bearded fellow, who plucked at the blue sleeve, whispered a word or two, then sat back in his chair again. Dupuk nodded, a look of cunning creeping into his somber face.

"Mebbe you tell me where your boss lives," he suggested. "I could bring this stuff over myself then. Save you the trip, eh?"

Durant remembered the hook-nosed man's insistence on secrecy and he shook his head, smiling.

"Sorry. Can't tell you. I guess you know why, better than I do."

Dupuk regarded him speculatively, and his glance traveled to the frayed cuffs of Durant's trousers, visible beneath the overcoat, traveled back to Durant's ragged cap, his thin gloves. He produced a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket and twisted it absently in his fingers.

"How much you want for tell me?"

"Nothing."

Dupuk was disappointed. He put back the money.

"What's his name then?"

"I don't know. He's the chief."

Dupuk looked at the bearded man, helplessly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You tell heem," squeaked the rat-faced fellow, excitedly, and suddenly there was a confusion of voices.

The men talked heatedly; there was much waving of arms, and finally Dupuk ended the argument by pounding his massive fist on the table so that the cards danced. He turned to Durant again.

"Tell the chief," he said, deliberately, "that he's got to come through. We're takin' the chances. We want to share up with him. If he don't, we give him no more stuff, see?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure you do," put in the fat young Russian, scornfully. "You tell him that, anyway. Us fellows have got together on this. One of our men got killed last week —" he stared at Durant, intently, then nudged the bearded man.

"Look!" he said. "It's his overcoat, even." He got up and went over to Durant, examining the overcoat carefully. "A bullet hole," he said, triumphantly, raising the skirt of the coat.

Durant looked down. Truly, there was a ragged hole in the cloth.

"I knew Hanski got a shot at him," went on the young Russian, bitterly.

He looked up at Durant.

"Mebbe you don't know," he said. "The fellow that had this job before you—he laid out one of our men, just last week. We'd have got him for it, but the chief got him out of town. So we're through. You tell your boss he's got to be fair with us—"

Durant was bewildered by these revelations.

"I don't know anything about it," he stammered, mechanically taking the heavy sack which Dupuk held out to him, and backing away.

He realized that he had blundered into a dark and lawless undertaking and his sole desire was to return to the Hawk and wash his hands of the affair.

"I'll tell him what you said."

No one answered. He went back down the stairs, and as he glanced back he saw the five staring at him with somber hatred in their eyes.

HE LEFT the lodging house and went up the street through the swirling snow. The mysterious sack was heavy, and he began to berate himself for taking it at all. The proper course would have been to refuse it altogether, but he had been so astonished by the attitude of the five men, so startled by the revelation that his predecessor had been a murderer who had narrowly escaped death himself at the hands of one of the gang, that he had taken the sack without realizing what he did. The overcoat then, had belonged to the former agent of the Hawk, who had been forced to flee because he had shot the luckless Hanski. Evidently his aim had been better than that of Hanski.

He did not know the nature of the dealings in which he had become involved, but clearly they were lawless, and clearly it was in his interests to break his agreement with the Hawk, at once. He judged, shrewdly, that the Hawk had purposely selected a penniless and hungry man for his purposes, realizing that hunger minimizes scruples, and believing that once Durant had entered his employ he would find it difficult to leave.

Something impelled him to look behind him, and in the shifting snow he saw a figure trudging along, not far behind. The figure seemed strangely familiar, and when Durant looked back the fellow's pace became slower.

Two streets farther, Durant became confused, and could not recollect the turning whereby he would reach the main thoroughfare. He looked about, in hope of seeing some pedestrian of whom he might inquire the way, and he saw that the man was still trudging along in his wake. He stopped and waited for the fellow to come up, but the other hesitated in his stride, stopped, and then came forward again. He hunched his shoulders up as he drew near, and buried his face deep in his coat collar. Durant inquired of him the way to the main street, but the dark figure passed by without a word, and vanished into the storm and the darkness.

Durant gazed after him in surprize, still vaguely convinced that he had seen the man before, and finally recognition flashed on him. The man was Dupuk. There was no mistaking the huge frame, the massive shoulders, even though he was now dressed for the out-doors, in a mackinaw and fur hat. He wondered if Dupuk were following him. The fellow was evidently in the dark as to the identity of the Hawk, and was anxious to shed some light on this phase of the business. The hook-nosed man, in his turn, was evidently determined to keep Dupuk and his gang in ignorance; hence his refusal even to tell Durant his name. He was taking no chances.

Durant resumed his journey and soon found the street he was looking for. He glanced behind every little while, however, and once or twice he thought he saw the same trudging figure, some distance to the rear again. This angered him, and finally he slipped into the shadow of a near-by building, where he waited. In a few minutes the man came hurrying along, looking to left and right. It was Dupuk, as he had surmised, and when he came abreast, Durant stepped out and confronted him.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

Dupuk stopped, and looked at him sullenly.

"What d'you mean?"

"Why are you following me?"

"I'm not."

"Yes you are. Listen here, Dupuk," he said. "I'm not going to tell you where I'm going and you're not going to find out. I don't know just what this business is all about, but I'm through with it, understand? There's no use following me, for I'll just keep walking around until I shake you off—so you'd better go home."

"I got a right to walk on the street."

"Sure you have, but I'm not going to get mixed up in any of your rows with the chief. If you keep following me around I'll knock your head off."

A deep voice broke in behind them.

"What's the trouble here?"

It was a voice of ponderous authority, and they turned, to confront a policeman, who had come upon them silently in the snow. Instinctively, Durant held the sack behind him, and Dupuk, with inherent fear of brass buttons and uniform, began to edge away, assuming an injured air.

"He's t'reatenin' me," he informed the officer, plaintively.

"Just a little argument," said Durant, casually.

He was aware that the officer was scrutinizing him closely, and that his shabby clothing and down-at-the-heels appearance were not in his favor; but the man of the law merely grunted, and moved away.

"Cut it out, then," he rumbled, majestically.

Dupuk had disappeared, and Durant, feeling somewhat foolish, went on his way.

THE DREW near the two cottages again. There had been no further sign of Dupuk, and he went part way up the walk leading to the Hawk's house before he caught sight of a vague shadow on the opposite side of the street. It may have been a man, it may only have been a shadow, but he hesitated, and then retraced his steps to the street again. He resolved to walk around for a while, in case Dupuk did happen to be lurking in the vicinity, to make sure of shaking off his pursuer.

A tall, rangy man in a red mackinaw, came swinging down the street, the snow crunching beneath his heavy shoepacks. He had a genial, ruddy face and a reddish mustache, a square, cleft chin, and as he swung into step beside Durant, with the easy freedom of North Country men, he ventured the observation that it was a bad night. Durant agreed with him. The stranger, swinging briskly along, wanted to know how long Durant had been in the North, how he liked the country, how he liked the weather, and what line of work he was in.

"Nothing, just now," said Durant, reflecting that since he was about to leave the service of the Hawk he might as well make the most of his time. "Don't know where I could get a job, do you?"

"Can't say as I do," said the stranger, shaking his head. "I'm up in the bush most of the time. The fur business is my line. Don't suppose you know anythin' about that do you?"

Durant confessed that he was ignorant of the fur business.

"Then I'm afraid I can't help you, lad. I'm sorry. Jobs are mighty scarce just now, ain't they?"

The stranger, with remarkable lack of reticence, spoke freely as they strode along, told Durant he was a fur-buyer, that he was leaving for the bush early the following morning on a buying trip, and opined that it was sweet weather to start out on a trip anywhere, much less into the bush.

They halted on a street corner, some three blocks away from the Hawk's cottage.

"Well, good luck," said the fur-buyer, when he saw that Durant was about to leave him. "I hope you land something pretty soon."

A thought struck him, and his hand went quickly to his pocket.

"Say, if you're outa luck and mebbe the loan of a tenspot would help you—", he said, awkwardly, but Durant shook his head.

"Thanks just the same. I'll land something."

"Well, I hope you do. Good-by."

A distant clock began to strike. They listened, counting the booming notes. Heavily, solemnly, through the storm, came the sounds. Durant had no idea, as he stood there with the ruddy-faced stranger, snow driving about them, listening to the sounds of the striking clock, borne on the sweeping wind, that it was one of the crucial moments of his life, and that his own destiny centered on those eight notes.

The last stroke died away.

"Eight o'clock!" exclaimed the other, in surprize. "I'll have to hurry. I'm leavin', first thing in the morning. Must get ready."

He strode away into the darkness.

Durant retraced his steps toward the Hawk's abode, feeling alone and friendless, resolved to leave the service of the mysterious and sinister man who had so strangely employed him, and again face the rigors of the northern night.

III

THE LET himself into the little house again. The moment he opened the door, he could hear the strange, roaring sound; and this time it seemed much greater in volume than it had been before. No longer was it muffled, no longer did it have the effect of coming from a great distance, but now its undiminished clamor seemed to rise out of the walls, in a hollow, incessant booming.

He went out into the kitchen, and put down the heavy sack. The light was still on, and in the center of the floor he saw an open space, where a trap-door had been lifted. He stared at this opening, realizing that this explained the increase in the volume of sound, and that the roaring came from the region beneath the house.

A flight of steps led down into the darkness, and although he hesitated for a moment, listening intently, he heard no voices —heard no other sound than the steady booming below. He was overcome by a desire to solve the mystery of this strange house. The trap-door seemed to offer a solution to all the circumstances that had puzzled him so greatly that evening; so curiosity, and the lure of the unknown, overcame his hesitancy, and he started down the flight of steps.

He found himself in a cellar, which was in darkness, save for the slanting beam of yellow light which fell through the opening in the kitchen floor, illuminating the steps halfway to the bottom. He picked his way, cautiously. The roaring sound was overwhelming, and its echoes throbbed back from the unseen walls. When he reached the foot of the stairs he groped his way forward, blinking, striving to pierce the gloom. Then, ahead, he saw a faint glimmer of light, a mere streak, and as he came near the light he heard voices.

He stopped, and remained still for a few minutes until his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and he saw near-by the faint outline of a door, a door which was not quite closed. From beyond this door came the roaring sound, and from beyond it, too, came the voices. He pressed closer, after a while, and listened.

"How did he get here, in the first place?" came the rasping voice of the Hawk, through the hollow booming. "Durant must have shown him the way—or else he followed him. I should have known better than to give that job to a stranger. He was sure to bungle it."

"You couldn't use a fellow who was well known." The second voice was curiously soft and mild, placating and subservient.

"Yes, you're right. I couldn't use any one well known. It's too dangerous. And Durant just landed in the camp. What an innocent! He believed everything. I told him it was secret mining business—"

"You weren't far wrong," came the reply, with a chuckle.

"But look what happened!" The voice of the Hawk—whose name appeared to be Wickley—rose in an intensity of exasperation. "The first time the new man goes out for stuff, Dupuk lands in on us. I've always been suspicious of Dupuk. He wanted to know too much."

Again the soft voice, and the quiet chuckle.

"He had a very bright scheme."

"Yes—blackmail. He wasn't content with just selling us the rock. He wanted to get in on the big game. The nerve of his proposition! And after all the trouble I took to see that none of those fellows would ever know anything about me!"

"How did he get down here in the first place. I never saw him. I was turning the crusher," went on the soft voice, "and then I looked, and he was standing right behind me. I tell you, it gave me a start."

"It must have been the trap-door," replied the Hawk. "Yes, the trap-door." Then, sharply. "I'd forgotten about it. The door's open now."

Durant, crouching in the darkness, heard three quick footsteps, as the Hawk strode toward the door. He had no time to regain the stairs, much less the kitchen, so he pressed himself close against the wall, and when the door swung open, a moment later, it concealed him from view.

"Yes—open," grumbled the Hawk, as he stepped into the cellar. "Just as I thought. If any cops had come blundering in while that was open, they'd have found everything."

He went on over to the stairs, muttering nervously.

"We'd best go up and see that everything's all right. I tell you, this is a bad business. That rumpus with Hanski last week—and now this!"

Durant, peering out, saw him ascend the

steps, crouching, and behind him came a most peculiar figure. In the gloom, it was impossible to distinguish the features, but he could see that the other man was gray-haired and slight of build; he was a little man, with a remarkable rapidity of movement. He had extraordinarily long arms, for one so small, and he scuttled up the steps very swiftly, disappearing through the trap in a flash, his progress uncannily effortless and silent.

The trap-door descended with a thud, and the beam of yellow light was blotted out.

Quietly Durant went into the underground room from which the two had just emerged. Their remarks about Dupuk puzzled him. Evidently the inquisitive one had obeyed Durant's warning, had seen him starting up the walk toward the cottage, and had proceeded to investigate the place. It was further evident that Dupuk had discovered the underground room, and that he had endeavored to set a price upon his silence or demand a share in the enterprise in which the Hawk was engaged. But why? And where was Dupuk now?

The place was a workshop of some kind. As though a bandage had been removed from his eyes, everything became suddenly clear.

At one side was a contrivance which he recognized as a crusher; between its jaws were fragments of quartz. The roaring sound, which had ceased when the Hawk left the cellar, had come from a small furnace, near-by. In a corner was a sack similar to the one he had received from Dupuk, and near-by were chunks of rock. Some of these gleamed dully, with yellow streaks.

High-grading!

That was it. The Hawk and the little man with the long arms were nothing more than high-graders. He remembered, then, stories he had heard of the activities of such people, who buy high-grade ore from miners who steal it while at work; and who then crush it and treat it in their own furnaces, producing pure gold. This was the explanation of the secrecy; this was why Dupuk and his gang, realizing that they were stealing high-grade which was bringing an enormous profit to the unknown master criminal, had been so anxious to get a hand in the bigger game.

The Hawk had worked under cover. He had made use of a go-between to secure the high-grade from Dupuk and his companions, and the others had known neither his identity nor the location of his den. The go-between had evidently shot one of Dupuk's gang who had sought to follow him, and had been forced to flee as a result. Durant was his successor.

He explored the little room cautiously, and realized that his position was desperate. The knowledge he held was dangerous. The Hawk had evidently planned to use him on one errand, then explain his plight to him, with threat of exposure if he did not continue. Certainly the Hawk would never permit him to leave the place alive, now that he knew.

Suddenly, he heard voices, footsteps on the cellar stairs again, and he knew that Wickley and the little man were returning.

He could not retreat to the darkness of the cellar again, for the two were now ascending the steps. The room in which he stood was but a cell, flooded with light. There was no hiding place.

* * *

THE clattering footsteps on the stairs were nearer, and he looked around, despairingly.

Suddenly his eyes lighted on the outline of a door, at the far side of the room. It was barely distinguishable, this door, and had it not been for the recent breaking of an encrustation of dust about it, he would never have noticed it at all. It was devoid of lock or handle of any kind, but frantically he pried at the sides of the door in the wall, trying to draw it open.

At his touch, the door swung silently inward. The hinges were well-oiled, for there was no sound, and quickly he stepped into a gloomy cavern, closing the heavy door gently behind him.

In the next moment, he could hear the muffled voices of the Hawk, and his accomplice, and he listened intently, wondering if they had found anything amiss, if they had heard or seen him leaving, but he could not distinguish their words. However, the dull roar of the furnace rose again in a moment, deadened by the intervening wall.

He was safe for the time being, so he struck a match and looked about him. He was in another cellar, and a flight of stairs led into the darkness above him.

This was, he judged, the cellar of the house adjoining. The high-graders' den occupied a third, and secret cellar, in the space between the two houses, accessible from either side, and yet, to all appearances, non-existent. It was a clever scheme, and he realized that he had stumbled upon a secret which the police and mine owners of the camp would give a great deal to know.

Carefully, he began to ascend the flight of stairs. The match flickered and died, leaving him in intense darkness. Everything was very still, save for the distant, muffled sound from the adjoining cellar.

When he reached the landing, he groped about and found a door, which opened directly before him, and then he found himself in a small kitchen.

There was a window, white with frost, directly opposite, and the room was bathed in an eerie light.

As he stood in the shadow of the doorway, he started, violently, for he confronted a dark figure, sitting in a chair, midway across the room.

There was something very ominous in the aspect of that silent figure, about that waiting man who seemed to be regarding him so steadily, so silently, and Durant was transfixed.

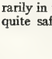
They faced each other, as if frozen with astonishment, and then Durant became aware of something more than ominous, of something deadly in the silence, something strange in the posture of the fellow, and when he spoke, his voice seemed thin and far away, scarcely his own—

"What are you doing here?"

There was no answer. The man in the chair did not move and, with sudden realization, Durant stepped forward and gazed into the ghastly face of Dupuk.

The man was dead.

IV



IN THE stiff and unnatural posture of Dupuk was an ironical repose; the silent, motionless figure seemed to be regarding him with gloomy contempt.

Dupuk, then, had paid for his curiosity with his life, and this was the explanation of the conversation between the Hawk and the long-armed man. When Durant had entered the cellar they had no doubt just returned from disposing of the body temporarily in the deserted house. They had felt quite safe, for Dupuk's companions, lawless men, would be bound by the protective secrecy necessitated by their own actions.

Durant, shaken, stared at the silent figure in the chair. Murder had been committed, and murder would be committed again if the high-graders realized he held their secret. He knew that there was no time to lose, that he must, for his own protection, report this affair to the police at once. True, he would have to admit that he had delivered high-grade to the Hawk, but he would have to take his chance on the consequences of this. He realized that if the slaying were discovered, and his own connection with the Hawk revealed, he would be implicated, for he had been last seen with Dupuk.

An involuntary shiver passed through him at the sight of that inert body, at the sight of that man to whom he had been talking not an hour before, now a helpless hulk of flesh; and the stolid corpse almost seemed to be grinning sullenly at him from the shadows.

Then came a sound—the most unexpected sound Durant had ever heard. It was a heavy footstep on the front veranda.

Following it came others, and there was a stealthy whispering. He wheeled about, catching a glimpse of shadows through the frosted glass of the door.

There were men out there, not one or two, but many men.

He felt like a trapped animal, and he looked wildly about him, confused, frightened, and he sprang to the doorway of the cellar and listened.

The whispering, the low voices, continued, and Dupuk, immobile, sprawled in his chair, gazed at the door with sightless eyes. There came the sharp sound of a key rattling in a lock.

Swiftly Durant stepped down the cellar stairs, moving carefully and silently despite his panic. He did not know who these men might be—probably some sent by the Hawk to remove the body—and as he moved into the darkness he heard the front door open, and then he heard men stamping their way into the hall.

Suddenly, an exclamation:

"I knew it! I knew there was somepin' wrong. There he is! Didn't I tell you? Look!"

An awed voice:

"My ——! It's a dead man—you was right!"

The startled voice again:

"Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you them lights meant somepin' queer was goin' on? And when I peeked through the kitchen windy I saw him just the way he is now—all hunched up in his chair—"

A heavy, authoritative voice broke in:

"Tell the boys to watch the back way. There's been no footsteps on the front walk and none anywhere else, so far as I can see. Mebbe they're still around. Gimme your flashlight!"

Then came a pause.

"Who is this guy? Anybody know him? No matter—he's dead enough." A further pause. "Why, I've seen this guy before. I'm sure of it. Right this evenin' too. Arguin' with a young fellow down the street. I'm sure of it. The same face—he was dressed just like this too—"

Footsteps—more voices—

Durant, hidden in the cellarway, was harassed by doubt and indecision. He had heard the authoritative voice before, of that he was certain, and then, in a flash, he remembered. It was the voice of the policeman who had interrupted his argument with Dupuk on the street not an hour before. He felt a cold hand clutching his heart. The officer had come upon them when they were quarreling, and now Dupuk had been found dead, and he, Durant, was hiding near-by. He bitterly regretted his concealment; for discovery was certain, and it would only make matters worse for him. But the officers had arrived so suddenly that he had hidden himself instinctively.

He crouched against the wall in the darkness at the foot of the stairs. He made up his mind to emerge, to go up and tell his story, from beginning to end, but hardly had the resolution formed in his mind than the cellar door opened.

"Look down there," commanded the authoritative voice, and there came a yellow beam of light which flashed on and hovered in a brilliant circle upon the wall.

It was directly beside Durant, and then it moved, and shone directly upon him. He stared, fascinated, at the bewildering gleam.

"Hey!" A shout of astonishment. "Here he is! Put up your hands, young fellow—I've got the drop on you." The barrel of a revolver shone in the light. "Come out of that!"

SO HE RAISED his arms, and came to the foot of the stairs, then slowly ascended. As he neared the steady, dazzling light, gazing at the revolver pointed at him, he felt his wrists seized, felt something cold and hard slip about them, and click. He was handcuffed.

"Well, young man," boomed the authoritative voice, "you didn't get away quick enough, did you?" Then the tone changed to one of incredulous astonishment and jubilation. "Why it's him! It's him! The young fellow that was arguin' with the stiff here!"

There was a murmur of rising voices, and Durant looked about him, at the shadowy figures crowding about him in the little kitchen, at the flashlight which shone so blindingly into his face and blotted out everything else, even the faces of his captors.

"If you'll give me a chance to explain," he said calmly, although his heart was pounding "I can clear everything up."

"You're under arrest for murder, young fellow, and anythin' you say may be used against you at the time of your trial, so watch your step."

"If you mean I had anything to do with this—" Durant motioned in the darkness toward Dupuk's body, "you're mistaken. If you will look about in the cellar you'll find a secret door in the wall. Open it, and you will find yourself in another cellar. There's a man they call the chief in there, and a fellow with long arms. They're high-graders. They killed Dupuk."

A dead silence ensued, and Durant was aware of the scrutiny of invisible men standing about him, regarding him as he stood, manacled, in the glare of the flashlight.

"Better and better," chuckled the policeman, from the gloom. "He spills everything on his pals. High-graders, eh? This is big stuff. Joe, you and a couple of the boys go take a look for that there door. There may be somethin' in this. A couple more of you go watch that house next door."

They waited; they heard the mysterious Joe and his helpers rummaging about in the darkness of the cellar. Then an exclamation of surprize as the door was discovered—further exclamations as it was opened; then the voices died away.

"Clear as mud!" rejoiced the policeman. "I come on this young fellow, and the dead guy here, arguin' in the middle of the street just a little while ago. And this lad here with a sack of high-grade in his hand all the time and me never suspectin' what it was. 'Threatenin' me', said the furriner to me, when I ast him what was the matter. He said this fellow was threatenin' him. And now look! Here he is, dead as a door-nail, and our young friend is hidin' in the cellar. If it hadn't been for that fellow passin' by on the street, seein' the lights, and peekin' through the window and spottin' the dead man settin' here, we'd mebbe never have found him. But there's always somepin' turns up. Always somepin'."

From outside the house came a shot. There were shouts, and sounds of a struggle, a thudding of footsteps on the veranda.

"They got 'em," grunted the policeman.

Men crowded in the front doorway. The electric lights in the house lacked bulbs, but more flashlights were produced, and in the light of these Durant saw the Hawk, his thin mouth contorted with fury, and the long-armed man, both handcuffed, struggling with their captors.

"Nabbed 'em just as they were clearin' out the door," exulted one. "Found their outfit and everything. High-graders is right!"

The Hawk then saw Durant for the first time. His keen eyes flashed to the huddled form of Dupuk, in the chair, and then he looked back at Durant again. There was remorseless hatred in his gaze.

"So!" he rasped. "You told! A lot of good it'll do you. After killing Dupuk here—"

Durant strode forward, dumfounded, but strong hands held him. The Hawk went on, biting off his words—

"If you can tell, Allan and I can tell a few things on you too. Don't worry. We'll give evidence. We saw you bump him off. Didn't we, Allan?"

He turned sharply to the long-armed little man, who was cowering in the glare of a flashlight near-by.

Allan nodded, dumbly, and then his lips curled in a smile as he realized the Hawk's intent.

"Yes, yes," he said vigorously. "We saw him—"

"We told you to be careful. But you wouldn't listen. No, you wouldn't listen—"

"That's right, Mr. Wickley," babbled Allan. "That's right. He wouldn't listen. He bumped Dupuk off. We'll give evidence. He told on us."

"You don't need to look for any help from us," rasped Wickley, fiercely. "You come to me beggin' for a job deliverin' high-grade, and then spill the works the first time you get in a jam. Kill a man that never did you no harm," he concluded virtuously.

The policeman, in the background, laughed heavily.

"We got 'em talkin' now," he rejoiced. "We got 'em talkin' for fair. Looks like the young lad is hooked. Once they start squealin' on each other it's all over but the shoutin'. Now mebbe we'll get some dope on that shootin' last week—"

"Yes," broke in Wickley, sharply. "The shooting last week. We protected you on that, Durant. We protected you on that, and look at the return we get. You shot Hanski, and got mighty near shot yourself—" He darted forward and clutched at the skirt of Durant's overcoat. "Look!" he said. "There's the bullet hole to prove it. You've got a list of the deliveries you made, right in the pockets of your coat now."

The big policeman roughly went through the pockets of the overcoat, triumphantly withdrawing a few crumpled sheets of paper. These, held under a flashlight, were found to be marked with lists of high-grade deliveries, the weight and the value of each. Durant's predecessor had evidently been a methodical man.

"I guess that fixes things," said the policeman, keeping a firm hand on Durant's shoulder. "We've been lookin' for you, my lad. We knew that shootin' last week was high-grading work, but we couldn't get anythin' certain. I'm thinkin' you're a bad customer. Two killin's we've got chalked up on you now."

Durant protested, but vainly. He was ordered to keep quiet and, in company with Wickley and Allan, was bundled out of the house. A crowd had gathered outside, and he was escorted through, the big policeman proudly leading the way.

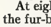
He realized that Wickley and Allan, to save their own skins, would hold to their story. The facts were against him. Then, from a babbling of voices behind him, he heard a remark that sent a thrill of hope through him.

"Just eight o'clock it was," said the voice. "Just eight o'clock when I peeped through that window and saw the dead guy sittin' in the chair. It gave me a turn. Eight o'clock exact, for I heard the town clock strikin' at the time. And it wasn't twenty minutes before we'd landed the murderer."

Eight o'clock!

At eight o'clock he had been talking with the fur-buyer on the corner. His alibi was already established. Mentally, he invoked blessings on the town clock.

But an alibi must be proven.



WHEN Durant, appearing for preliminary hearing next morning in the weekly police court, heard the report of the lawyer who had been assigned to his case, he realized that circumstances against him were even blacker than he had first supposed. The lawyer regretfully, even suspiciously, informed him that all efforts to locate a fur-buyer, who had been talking with him the previous night, had been unavailing. There were several fur-buyers in the camp. Two, in fact, had gone out into the bush that very morning, one to the north, another to the west. They would be gone for weeks.

His whole tone, however, expressed a disbelief of Durant's story.

The preliminary hearing was soon over. Wickley and Allan, who had been quite content to plead guilty to high-grading, in evading the more serious charge, gave damning testimony against him. They perjured themselves thoroughly.

Of the members of Dupuk's gang, there was no trace. They had disappeared, and Durant had not known their names. Even now, they were doubtless in tremulous hiding, in some of the lodging houses in "Poland."

Durant, penniless and unknown, had no chance. He was a vagrant, one who had not been above joining forces with high-graders, and who had betrayed his employer. Wickley and Allan swore they saw him kill Dupuk, in a quarrel over money. There was the testimony of Dupuk's wife, who said Durant had called on her husband the previous night, and had left carrying a heavy sack. There was the evidence of the policeman, who had come upon Dupuk and Durant quarreling in the street. Dupuk had said Durant was threatening him. Finally, there was the fact that Durant had been found hiding in the cellar of the house wherein the slain man was discovered.

He was not permitted to give evidence, the purpose of a preliminary trial in Canadian criminal procedure being to establish merely the fact that the Crown has sufficient evidence against a prisoner to warrant holding him for the assizes. Durant, who, like most law-abiding men, regarded the mechanism of the law as a powerful protective force, guarding the good and smiting the wicked, had assured himself that the law, demanding proofs and counter-proofs on every hand, would soon vindicate him. He found that this very insistence on an unbroken chain of evidence weighed heavily against him.

He was committed for trial on the charge of killing Dupuk. There were probabilities that he might also be later charged with the killing of Hanski.

Opinion was general that he would hang.

That very afternoon, desperate in the knowledge that if he could locate the fur-buyer who had been talking with him when the clock struck eight, he would be saved, Durant was taken from the jail. In company with Wickley and Allan and a negro prisoner, on their way to serve their respective sentences, he set out in a sleigh, guarded by two officers, for the railway bound for the district jail.

V

THEY sat facing one another in two rows in the wide sleigh that lurched and swung heavily about as the horses toiled up the slope. Three on one side, three on the other, they were huddled together, with huge fur robes pulled about them to protect them from the intense cold of the winter afternoon. These six did not include the driver, an enormous figure in bearskin coat, who sat in front.

Durant was manacled to Sam Briggs, the negro, and beside them sat a provincial officer. Wickley and Allan, also handcuffed, sat opposite, also guarded. The two policemen, stern, clean-cut, faced each other impassively, at the end of the sleigh.

"How much longer?" demanded Wickley.

They had been on the road two hours, and even the fur robes were insufficient to protect them from the penetrating cold.

"Bring us out here to freeze? How much longer? We shouldn't have to put up with this—"

One of the officers turned slightly and glanced at him.

"That'll be enough from you," he answered, in clipped, metallic tones. "You'll be there soon enough."

He pulled up the collar of his beaver coat, turned away again, and looked out over the snow.

Allan and the negro stirred faintly at the sound of the voice. Their faces were scarcely visible, for the late afternoon was so bitterly cold that they had huddled far beneath the furs for warmth. Durant, alone, was unmoved, crouching in silent misery—crushed by the circumstances that had befallen him.

Wickley, his gaunt face haggard with bitterness and defiance, was encouraged by these sluggish manifestations of discomfort.

"Fine place to take us!" he rasped. "Nearly night, and a storm comin' up, and us with fifteen miles to go. Fine way to manage things! But you don't care. You don't care if we all freeze—you in your fur coat!"

He flung an angry look at the late afternoon sky. The sun, which had not been seen all day, was struggling feebly, but without success, to emerge from behind some ragged clouds, and more clouds were scurrying. Snow lay heavily upon the great white plain they had just traversed, the road running across it like a smudgy pencil mark, ascending the mountain side in twistings and turnings.

On either side rose great crags, gray and naked to the north wind, snow clinging to them in immense sheets; beyond the crags the sky was bleak and hopeless, gray with that peculiar quality of gloom that masks a brooding storm. The road, leading up through the rocky defile, seemed to climb infinitely toward that drab sky, and something of the spirit of the mournful progress appeared to have communicated itself to the men in the sleigh, for despair and misery hung over them like a cloud.

At the top of the rise the horses rested with bowed heads, steam rising from their bodies; and the wind swept down upon the sleigh, swept bitterly down from the lowering crags. Those frozen monsters of rock, each rising from the snow as if petrified in the act of shaking off the clinging whiteness, rose gloomily on either side, hemming them in, grudging even the narrow roadway. Durant could see, far below, back of them, the road stretching down the slope into the hopeless white wilderness that stretched in sharply jutting hills; through little clumps of evergreens, black against the snow, toward a hazy line of forest on the distant horizon.

That bleak vista was as devoid of hope as his own life, for he felt crushed by an enormous weight of lies and mistakes; he was friendless and alone. He was so cold that his face was numb, his body stiff with chill, and even the buffalo robe that covered him was heavy and unwieldy. Under the robes, he clenched and unclenched his rigid fingers in their tattered gloves; he could feel the wrist of the sullen negro who was handcuffed to him; he shuffled his feet, which seemed to become heavier and more devoid of feeling every moment.

His fingers felt like hard wax; his feet like frigid weights.

The horses moved on, the sleigh giving a sudden lurch, the sleighbells jangling. He noticed that a great mist was springing up, far across the wide snow country behind them, to the north. Already this mist veiled the distant forests; the snow plain merged with the mist and the sky, so that the road appeared to rise out of a prodigious gray sea. The rocks and clumps of trees at the foot of the mountain were still in view, but the distant mist was approaching, overtaking them swiftly; and in the cloud one sensed a turmoil.

ALLAN and Wickley were whispering, under cover of the robes. The officers did not appear to notice. Durant regarded the thin, gray face of Allan, and he could see the sharp little eyes, darting glances obliquely about the sleigh, as he whispered to the Hawk. Allan, he realized, was weak, vicious, cowardly and cunning. From his lawyer he had learned the little man's history. He was a deformed and broken-down chemist, who had fallen on evil days, and thence into evil ways. Wickley, the man of action and daring, had used him to assist in his high-grading enterprise. Allan's feeble personality was overswayed by that of the Hawk, and he lived in obsequious fear of the master.

The sleigh reached the top of the climb, and the countryside, before them and behind, was veiled in storm. Snowflakes, large and white, were falling, thickly, silently, until the buffalo robes were covered with myriad spangles.

A tense excitement seemed to possess Wickley and Allan as their whispering continued. One of the officers looked at them and frowned, but he said nothing. Cold and discomfort had dulled his suspicions.

The humming of the wind became a whistling; the snowflakes became smaller, and multiplied by millions; the air was filled with a confusion of fine, shifting white pin-points that almost hid the near-by crags from view. The road came from nowhere and went nowhere.

Snow filled the little folds and ridges of the driver's great coat, until he was soon enveloped in white. He crouched on the seat like a massive, immobile ghost. The men in the sleigh were shapeless hulks, faceless, formless. All the while, the snow drove steadily about them, and heaped itself on the robes unheeded.

The horses began the descent, bracing themselves as the road dipped and turned and twisted about among the rocks, which appeared and disappeared vaguely through the storm. The snow was like fine salt, and it was cast in sheets by the shrieking winds. Once in a while, through the infinite whiteness, clumps of tall pine trees loomed out of the white wall, threshing and bowing to the gale.

Durant was aware of a foot striking against his own, and then he felt the negro beside him stir and look up. Across from him he saw Allan's shrewd little eyes, blinking at him, full of purpose. He stared, not understanding, and then he saw that the negro had caught the signal also, and was staring too. Apathetically, they looked at Allan, who cast a sidelong glance in the direction of the officers.

The two guards, confident in the knowledge that their charges were manacled and unarmed, had shrunk into the depths of their fur coats until their faces were no longer visible. They dozed, numb with cold, stiff with lack of movement.

Wickley emerged from above his robe, and his thin lips were set with cruelty and determination; there was a bold light in his eyes, and under the robes one sensed that his body was tense. His lips moved slowly, and Durant distinguished the words—

"Get ready," scarcely audible.

He glanced at the negro; the black fellow understood, for he licked his heavy lips, and his head nodded sharply. Allan glanced up at Wickley, in a manner curiously subservient.

Clearly they were meditating an attack, an attempt at escape. Wickley looked at the driver. The horses seemed to be having difficulty; the wall of snow was so thick that even the road had been lost to view. The sleigh was moving down a steep incline, and the driver was absorbed with his task; he was standing up, drawing back on the reins.

Durant felt a tug at his wrist. The negro was indicating that he must prepare. He had resolved to take no part in the attempt, but he was not ready for what followed.

Wickley and Allan, by a concerted movement, launched themselves upon the officer on their side of the sleigh, and at the same time the negro, catching Wickley's signal, rose and flung himself upon the officer beside him. The black man was very powerful, and Durant was dragged to his feet by the steel chain that manacled them. In a moment he found himself at the bottom of a struggling heap of bodies, his wrist twisted and turned agonizingly with every convulsive move the negro made.

The guards had been taken entirely by surprize, and the very fact that their attackers were manacled was against the officers. The fellow chosen by Wickley and Allan had been hurled to the bottom of the sleigh before he realized what had happened, and now he was battling silently and desperately, the steely fingers of Allan at his throat, and the links of the handcuffs cutting into his face. He was vainly endeavoring to reach his revolver, but he was oppressed by struggling bodies and blinded with pain; in this inextricable mêlée, the negro, Briggs, was rolling about in a ferocious struggle with his guard. Briggs was handicapped, because Durant had been flung beneath the officer, and this left the negro but one free fist; this black bludgeon, however, he used to brutal effect, delivering smashing blows into the officer's face, until the man was bruised and bleeding.

The sleigh was lurching to and fro. The driver cast a hasty glance behind, and realized the situation. He was in a predicament; he saw that the officers had been overcome, but he did not know whether to risk coming to their rescue, for the sleigh was on a steep mountain road, in a blinding snowstorm, and a firm hand was needed on the reins. However, still grasping the reins, he leaped back over the seat and then, forgetting caution, flung himself into the struggle.

One of the officers finally reached his revolver, and out of the confusion of arms and legs and furs rang a shot. The driver gasped, and tumbled back on to the floor of the sleigh, wounded.

The sleigh itself was swaying madly; the horses, frightened by the shot, feeling no restraining hand upon the reins, began to rear and plunge, then broke into a run. The sleigh gathered momentum, clouds of snow rose from the horses' hoofs.

Wickley rose from the mass, dragging Allan with him, and he held aloft something that glittered and jangled. He looked around him, in one swift instant realizing their plight, and then leaped for the end of the sleigh.

"Jump for it," he shouted, and even as the battered officer at their feet struggled to rise, Wickley and Allan disappeared over the end of the sleigh, wrists still chained together, and went tumbling over and over in the snow.

BRIGGS, too, aroused himself at the shout. He had battered his man into unconsciousness, and now, with a savage snarl, he struggled loose. Durant's arm was almost wrenched from its socket as he was dragged out from under the unconscious form, and then, as the sleigh swayed madly from side to side, lurched and bumped and seemed constantly on the point of overturning, the negro sprang for the side of the sleigh, dragging him along. The black man poised for a moment, to give Durant time, and then, together, they balanced on the seat and leaped.

He toppled over into the snow; there was cold snow in his eyes, in his ears, about his wrists; and then he was brought up with a sudden jerk, and found himself sprawled beside the negro, who looked up, dazed, cursing vaguely.

Together, they looked down the hillside. The horses had left the road, and there was a great flurry of snow through the storm, a flurry of snow which told them of the terrible progress. Finally, a dark shape rose up, as the sleigh tipped completely over; one of the horses fell, dragging the other with it. The sleigh rose in the air again, like a living thing, once more toppled over, and then, in a hideous confusion, sleigh, horses and men tumbled down the steep hillside in a tremendous cloud of snow.

"Boy—dey's gone," said the negro, in an awed tone. "Dey's suah gone."

They got up. Durant made a step down the hillside, toward the vanished sleigh, but the negro turned back toward Wickley and Allan, now standing in the swirling snow above them. He jerked impatiently at the handcuffs, and as he was a powerful fellow, Durant was forced to follow.

Wickley, standing tall and gaunt and dark in the sweeping white tornado, his greatcoat flapping open, stared down the hillside, his sinister face aglow with triumph. Allan, standing knee-deep in the snow, handcuffed to Wickley by one wrist, stared up at him, admiringly, grinning.

"We made it!" shouted Wickley, exultantly. "It's a getaway, sure. Better than anything we could have figured on!"

"The runaway," babbled Allan. "We never counted on that."

"No. Everything went our way. We'd figured on gettin' a gun, at the most. But the breaks we got. The breaks. The horses bolted—and here we are, all safe and sound." Wickley examined the bruised knuckles of one hand, and then held out, before Durant and the negro, a bunch of keys.

"And these too!" he said. "I knew our man had 'em. Saw him put them in his pocket. I made for them first thing. If it hadn't been for the horses running away I'd had time to get his gun too—"

"Keys!" said the negro, unbelievingly. "Handcuff keys?"

"Handcuff keys! I dove straight for his pocket. What a fight he put up for 'em, too!"

Swiftly, Wickley began going over the keys, of which there were a number, and at last he selected two of the smallest. The first, he tried on the lock of the handcuff about his own wrist, but it did not fit. He tried the other. It was the right key, and in a moment he and Allan were free, and the shackles had been cast into the snow. The other key proved to be that belonging to the handcuffs of Durant and the negro.

"Now where?" asked Allan, shivering with the cold. His face was like parchment, and his cunning eyes were bleak.

"I know a road," declared Wickley.

"We passed it, back in the mountain—"

Durant turned an inquiring face toward him.

"We can't go away and leave them there," he said, motioning to the bottom of the steep incline, toward the white inferno into which the men and horses and sleigh had gone tumbling.

"Leave them!" said Wickley fiercely. "Why not? We're goin' to get away from them as quick as we can. They might be alive yet. Sure we'll leave them. They'd leave us quick enough if they were in our shoes. I know a road, a road to the river. It branches off hereabouts, and we can take it and mebbe get to the halfway."

The negro was shuddering with the cold. They stood like black ghosts in the sweeping snow, and the gale roared about them.

"Wheah's 'at road?" he asked. "Ah'm freezin'—"

Durant realized that if he accompanied these men, and they were later recaptured, he would be further identified in the public mind as a criminal and as an associate of criminals. The attack on the guards may have even ended fatally, and in flight he would be sharing the guilt. He hesitated, and Wickley strode over to him.

"You come with us," he ordered viciously. "Think we're going to leave you behind and tell which way we went, eh? It's your fault that we're here now. You was the one that squealed on me and Allan. By all rights we oughta leave you here and let you take what's comin' to you. But it ain't convenient. Come on, now!"

He turned his back, and started up the half-hidden road, into the teeth of the bewildering storm, Allan slipping and stumbling by his side. His long arms dangled by his sides, and in the shifting snow he was like the blurred figure of an ape, awkwardly facing the blizzard and being swallowed up by it. The negro wasted no time on words when he saw that Durant still remained where he was. He grasped Durant by the collar, and pushed him ahead, and when the young man resisted, Briggs brushed up against him, his black, brutal face close, his thick lips bared from his gleaming teeth.

"Doan' keep me waitin'," he growled, and jostled Durant forward by main force.

Wickley glanced back once, nodding his satisfaction when he saw that the negro was herding Durant along. And so the four stumbled on up the mountain, turning their backs on the wreck of the sleigh somewhere down on the snow-wrapped slope, and trudged wearily into the storm toward the looming crags above.

VI

INTO a defile between the lowering rocks strode Wickley, and for a moment they appeared cut off from the snow; it was as if the storm had ceased, although they could still hear the wind howling above them, but after a while they came out on to the mountain side again. They were now off the main road, and following a trail partly protected by the immense masses of rock.

Wickley descended it unerringly. The wind swept down upon them, chilling them to the marrow. The snow swept over them in sheets, and went sweeping across the mountain in an incessant procession of unfurling white flags.

"I knew there was a trail here," shouted Wickley, halting for a moment to await the others. "I knew it was here. We'll make for the halfway. It's safe as a church."

There had once been a mining camp on the river, in the early days when men flocked like sheep in the wake of any who found gold or promise of it. This mining camp, like many others, had sprung up suddenly and had died as swiftly, and there was only a trail, leading from the main road to the abandoned camp, to remind the world of its existence. The trail was not entirely unused. Fur-buyers found it of value, and trappers and Indians followed it on their way to town and the railway.

A halfway house had been erected in the early days, and now it stood deserted, used now and then by the itinerant traveler as a shelter for the night. The halfway was a misnomer, for it stood but a mile from the main road, northwest of the mountain, in mournful isolation.

To this place Wickley was leading the fugitives. It was at least a refuge from the storm, and it appeared to strengthen his bid for freedom. Once at the halfway, with the guards either killed in the wreck of the sleigh or facing death in the storm — free of pursuit for the time being, he planned to go on to the river, and there bargain with the Indians, or with whomever he could find, for guidance to freedom by the myriad winter trails.

It was growing darker, for the sun had gone down, unseen, and the shadows of the immense rocks had grown deeper. The swift northern twilight had blotted out the country below. Gloom crept about them, and with it the wind rose higher; became a blinding gale, and the snow slashed at them with greater fury.

They reached the foot of the mountain at last, and there the wind whooped at them savagely. Wickley halted, because the trail was completely obliterated. The darkness was so intense and the storm so fierce that Durant could barely see the shadowy form of the negro beside him.

They stared into the night, and as they stared, there came a momentary lull in the storm, and far out in the sable waste flickered a dull and feeble glow.

"A light!" shouted Wickley. "A light!"

They gazed into the snow-wracked gloom, too numb, too exhausted to care, and the wind whooped and sent the snow scurrying and whirling in their faces. The light gleamed again. It was enough for Wickley. He had found his direction, and he strode eagerly forward again.

"Some one got there before us," he flung back over his shoulder. "No matter. We'll go ahead."

The light gleamed intermittently before them through the fierce gusts of snow like a beacon, and wearily they ploughed toward it through the heavy drifts. Durant's face was drawn with pain, his eyes staring with fatigue, and he stumbled forward in a stupor of anguish, for the struggle against the storm was terrific. Allan floundered waist-deep in the snow, groaned and fell; he would have lain there but Wickley cursed savagely, dragged him roughly to his feet and he limped forward once more. The negro, head down, plunged stolidly on. And the light glowed, seeming always far ahead, as if it were moving ever away, luring them on and on through the unending drifts, to be battered to death by the storm, to perish miserably in the gale. In the darkness they could not distinguish one another, save as blindly plunging shapes.

Gradually the light grew brighter, and shone more steadily—shone even through the high-flung, shifting sheets of snow. Soon they could distinguish a dark mass, and so, as the storm raged, they reached the halfway.

It was a sturdy, one-story structure of logs. It was surprizing that there was a light, for few were the travelers on the trail to the river at that time of year; but the frosted window glowed, now bright, now dim, in a manner that told them the light was from a fire.

Their apathetic, half-frozen features lighted up, and they would have trooped wearily up to the door at once had not Wickley restrained them with a swift gesture of his lank arm. They stood knee-deep in the snow, like timid cattle, with the storm roaring about them, while Wickley became a gaunt shadow and, creeping up on to the veranda, peered through the window. Even as he stood there, his hawk-like visage faintly silhouetted, a snarling rose from the rear of the building, and they knew dogs were tethered there. Wickley turned and beckoned.

"It's all right," he said. "A man in here—only one."

They stumbled up on to the veranda, out of the raging wind, and Wickley strode to the door, pounded upon it, threw it open and entered.

They trooped into the warm room, and in the glow of the roaring blaze in the wide fireplace, stood a man, who gazed at them in surprize.

Durant stood motionless, gaping with astonishment.

FOR the tall, rangy figure who rose from before the fire, holding a frying pan in one brawny hand, was no other than the fur-buyer who held the proof of his innocence—the man to whom he had been talking on the street corner as the clock struck eight the previous night.

He had an insane desire to rush toward the big man, to tell his story, to explain how important had become the circumstance that together they had stood listening to the strokes of the clock, to gasp out his incredulous relief at this unexpected meeting, but instinctive caution restrained him. He saw the man step back as Allan, Wickley and the negro strode toward the fire and stood before it, hands outstretched to the blaze, gabbling with relief at having found warmth at last, and then the stranger looked at him. His eyebrows arched with recognition; he smiled, and would have spoken, but Durant shook his head swiftly and placed a finger on his lips. The man looked puzzled, but he understood, and turned to the three before the fire.

He had been frying bacon over the blaze, and a coffee pot was bubbling; these savory odors permeated the room. His pack-sack, half-opened, was lying on the floor, and a revolver in holster, with belt attached, had been flung carelessly on the table.

"Did you come on foot?" asked the stranger, speaking for the first time.

Wickley nodded. He replied, without turning around:

"We're nearly dead. Got lost in the storm." His teeth were chattering. "It's a bad night."

"It certainly is a bad night," agreed the man. "You'd have frozen if you hadn't found the halfway."

"Mighty near froze afore we got heah," mumbled Briggs, the negro, his black hands to the flames.

Allan, shivering, was looking around, his keen little eyes taking in every detail of the building. The halfway house consisted of two rooms, formed by a partition across the centre. The door leading to the other room was closed. Allan's eyes darted to the table, and when he saw the revolver, he gave Wickley a scarcely perceptible nudge. As if he read the thoughts of the long-armed man, the stranger moved casually over to the table and put down the frying pan. The revolver was hidden by his body for a moment, and when he moved away again, the weapon was gone.

Allan's thin lips drew back with disappointment.

The fur-buyer had betrayed no curiosity, no surprize at the inexplicable arrival of the quartette out of the storm, and he no longer looked at Durant. He fried more bacon, put more coffee in the pot and soon offered food to his visitors. After a while they ate, avidly, seated about the rough wooden table.

Durant wondered how he could acquaint the stranger with the facts of the situation, without precipitating interference from Wickley. Rare good fortune had thrown the fur-buyer in his path again, just at a time when things against him were at their blackest; he was resolved to move cautiously and make the most of their timely meeting.

After all, it was logical enough that the fur-buyer should be in this particular shack, of all places. He had left the town in the morning, bound for the bush country, as he had said. Seeing that a storm was on the way, he had remained at the halfway, taking no chances on being caught in the blizzard. Now he was host to four weary, half-frozen wanderers who had come upon him inexplicably out of the night.

Wickley, Durant noticed, kept glancing at the stranger, with a puzzled expression. Once or twice he bit his thin lips, as if in annoyance, and finally he looked up.

"What's your line?" he inquired abruptly.

"Oh, I just travel around," replied the stranger, evasively.

"Trapper?"

"I've been a trapper, in my time."

Wickley pursued his inquiry no further. He saw that the stranger was not inclined to talk about himself.

After the meal, the man smiled apologetically.

"You came in so unexpectedly," he said, "that I forgot to feed my dogs. I guess I'll look after them now."

He got up, and moved easily over toward the door.

"Would you mind lending me a hand," he said, looking at Durant. "Some of the harness seemed a bit loose today. If you'll hold a light for me—"

He picked up a small electric flashlight from his pack-sack as he spoke, and Durant, with simulated indifference, got up and followed him. The door closed behind them.

They had no sooner left than Wickley rose to his feet, angrily.

"That's a plant," he rasped. "He wants to talk to Durant—there's something fishy about this—"

The puzzled look again crossed his face. He could not rid himself of a conviction that he had seen the stranger before. He turned and swiftly crossed the room, going into the adjacent chamber.

This room was wide, and bare of furniture, although there were bunks along the walls, crudely built. There was one window, and it was covered with white frost. He went over to it, and as he drew near, he could hear voices. The window was at the rear of the building, overlooking the place where the stranger had left his dogs, and a fierce light of exultation came into the Hawk's cold eyes as he pressed close to the opaque pane. Without seeing, or without being seen, he could clearly hear Durant and the other man in conversation.

"Well," came the stranger's voice. "We meet again. You didn't want them to know you'd seen me before?"

"No," replied Durant, hastily. "I wanted a chance to talk to you. I'm in trouble—"

"A queer-looking gang you're traveling with."

"They're crooks. Jail-birds—we escaped this afternoon—"

"Crooks. I thought so by the look of them. But what do you mean by 'we'?"

"I'm one of them. Everything's happened since you saw me last night. I've been arrested for murder—"

"Glory be! You work fast, lad. Tell me about it."

Wickley listened, crouched tensely in the gloom, as Durant hastily recited the story of the previous evening's happenings, and explained his present predicament. The stranger punctuated the tale with frequent invocations of the deity, and when Durant pointed out that his one hope lay in the fact that the crime had been committed before eight o'clock, and that the body had been seen in the deserted house, while the clock was striking the hour, he exclaimed with amazement—

"BUT you were with me at eight o'clock!"

"That's the point. Without you to back me up, I can't prove it."

"Of course I'll prove it," exclaimed the other. "It's a frame-up, pure and simple. Those other fellows did the job, and they shoved the blame on you to save themselves. There's no denyin' things looked bad against you. Of course, I'll prove it. Why we counted the strokes of the clock."

"We'll have to get out of here. I don't intend to go on with these fellows. I'm going back to give myself up—"

"Of course, we'll get out of here. I'll go back with you. I'll prove your alibi. Everybody knows Tim Conley. My word's good with them police."

Conley! Like a great light, the name burst on the listening Wickley. Now he remembered. Tim Conley, the fur-buyer. He knew he had seen the man before, and now he recollected Conley as a not unfamiliar figure in the mining camp, and a fur-buyer of some note in the North.

Other thoughts raced through his mind, not connected with Conley's knowledge of Durant's innocence. Fur-buyers, he knew, carried large sums of money with them on their expeditions into the wilderness; furthermore, money was needed to facilitate his escape.

He knew he had come into the possession of valuable information, and that he held the upper hand, in that Durant and Conley were so far unaware that he had overheard their pact. So he listened further, his mind working swiftly, as he planned his course.

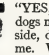
"How can we get away?" Durant was asking. "They'll suspect something."

"We'll get away, never fear," said Conley. "We'll make a bolt for it when they're asleep. The storm is dying down, and I have my dogs. Toward morning, we should be able to make a break for it. Have they any guns?"

"None."

"So much the better. I thought the white-haired lad that looks like a fox was eyein' my revolver, so I took it out of his reach. So that gives us the advantage if it comes to a fight. But there'll be no fight. We'll just sneak away quietly. Perhaps them police on the sleigh wasn't killed at all, and no doubt they're huntin' high and low for you now. In any case, all the police in the North will be on the lookout within the next twelve hours. So you must go back, to be sure. For they'd get you, sooner or later, and then you'd be done for, because they wouldn't believe your alibi. An innocent man doesn't run away, they'd say."

"We'd better go back in the house now. They'll be suspecting something."



"YES, we'll go back. I'll feed the dogs now. When we get back inside, don't pay any attention to me. We'll wait till they're asleep before we do anything."

Their voices died down, and then a snarling suddenly arose. Wickley realized that Conley was feeding his dogs. He had no time to lose. He crossed the room swiftly.

Before the fireplace, Allan and Briggs were sitting. Allan's shrewd little eyes were alight with curiosity. Briggs regarded him dully, the firelight shining on his ebony face.

"Find out anything?" asked Allan.

"Plenty." Wickley resolved to appeal to their avarice, rather than divulge all that he had learned. "That man's a fur-buyer."

"Ah!" The shrewd little eyes twinkled.

The negro blinked, not understanding.

"A fur-buyer!" repeated Wickley, impatiently. "That means he has money. Three or four thousand dollars in his belt. They never travel with less."

Allan licked his lips nervously. The negro's eyes began to shine, and he showed his strong white teeth in a nervous grin.

"How come you know dat?" he asked.

"I heard him telling Durant, outside. These fur-buyers never travel with less."

With a swift gesture, Wickley indicated the door.

"We've got to get that gun off him," he snapped, decisively. "Then we get the money. There's no better time than right now."

Allan ventured—

"He might shoot—"

"You always were a yellow coward," said Wickley savagely. "Of course he's got a gun. But he won't have it long if we go after it right. Think of the money, man. Think of the money. Three or four thousand. We'll need it, to buy our way clear—"

"We's gwine git it," said Briggs eagerly. Wickley sped swiftly over beside the door. "Over there," he commanded, indicating the opposite side, and the negro took up his position, his black fists clenching in readiness.

Allan, with inherent timidity, came over, and stood back of him.

There were footsteps on the veranda.

"Ready, now," whispered Wickley.

"I'll take care of Durant. You handle Conley. Get the gun—that's the main thing. The gun!"

The negro nodded. Allan's long, bony fingers clenched and unclenched nervously. The fire crackled and cast long shadows across the room. They could hear Durant and Conley on the veranda, stamping the snow off their feet.

The door opened.

VII

DURANT entered first. Unsuspectingly, he stepped quickly into the room, and Wickley bided his time, waiting until he was well clear of the threshold, and until Conley was in the doorway. Then, as Allan and the negro sprang upon the fur-buyer, he leaped at Durant.

The young man had turned, slightly, at the sound, but he was taken entirely by surprize, and Wickley was upon him before he realized that he had walked into a trap. He staggered back, under the force of the Hawk's onslaught, and then he was thrown to the floor so violently that the breath was knocked out of him. Wickley dug the heel of his fist cruelly into Durant's face until he writhed with pain, and lay there, kicking and threshing about, unable to dislodge his attacker.

Conley, too, had been taken by surprize. The negro smashed a heavy fist into his face, and Allan, circling warily about, came at him from behind. Conley, staggered by the force of the blow, had not time to collect himself before the long, incredibly strong arms of Allan entwined themselves about his own, pinioning them behind his back, and at the same time, the negro kicked his feet out from under him, so that he fell, and all three went down in a heap.

The fur-buyer was not beaten. He struck out with his heavy shoe-packs at random, just as Briggs was disengaging himself, and there was a yelp of pain, as the negro doubled up from the effects of a vicious kick in the groin. He rolled over and over in agony, clutching at his abdomen, and Conley twisted desperately about. Allan, seeing that Briggs was out of the combat for the time, wavered, for he was inherently cowardly, and with a terrific wrench, Conley freed his arms.

One hand flashed toward the pocket of his coat. Allan, realizing his intention, clutched despairingly at his wrist. He was still behind the fur-buyer, and Conley could not strike at him freely.

Slowly, against the strength of the long-armed man, Conley's hand emerged from the pocket. There was a dull gleam of steel.

Wickley caught a glimpse of this and, abandoning Durant, he made a wild leap toward the weapon, just as Conley, still on his knees, wrenched free of Allan's grasp. With the quickness of a rattler, Wickley brought down his lank arm, and the revolver was dashed to the floor, Wickley, in the same movement, springing after it.

Durant had scrambled to his feet. He saw Wickley reaching for the revolver and he leaped upon the Hawk, but Briggs, having recovered himself, saw the danger. He came plunging in, grinning with pain and rage, and struck out savagely at Durant. A heavy fist caught him behind the ear, knocking him to one side, just as his fingers had closed about Wickley's wrist, and then the negro grappled with him.

Allan, with the desperation born of terror, had made an attempt to seize Conley's arms again, but the fur-buyer had shaken him off viciously, and Allan lay gasping in a corner, his mouth bleeding—but the delay had been sufficient.

"Up—up with 'em," rasped Wickley, lying on the floor, turning the revolver upon the fur-buyer. "Quick!"

Conley's arms went up.

WICKLEY was master of the situation.

The revolver was more potent than majority of numbers. Both Durant and Conley knew that the Hawk would not hesitate to make full use of the weapon. They subsided. Within five minutes Allan and the negro, who discovered a length of stout rope in one of the abandoned bunks in the other room, had bound Conley hand and foot to one of the upright scantlings supporting the bunks. Durant was forced to submit to having his wrists bound behind his back. He hoped that he would be left in the room with Conley, but the Hawk was too wily for that.

"You stay with us," he ordered, and the negro unceremoniously dumped Durant into a corner by the fireplace.

Wickley stood in the center of the room, tall, commanding, his hawk-like face eager with victory, and the flames cast a gigantic shadow of his gaunt figure upon the walls. He emphasized his commands by brandishing the revolver, symbol of his authority, and Allan and Briggs hastened to his bidding. The door leading to the other room banged behind them as they left Conley, bound in limb but not in tongue, cursing them, their ancestors and their descendants.

"Now," said Wickley, as Allan and Briggs stood before him at last, breathing heavily, "let's sit down and talk things over."

He pulled up a chair to the table and seated himself. Allan, brushing back a strand of gray hair from his pale, sweating forehead, sank down upon a near-by box and then, producing a handkerchief, began to dabble at his bleeding mouth. The negro, scratching his woolly head, stood waiting.

"That man has money on him," began Wickley.

"Why yes," agreed Allan, in surprize. "We forgot that. We forgot the money."

He half rose from his seat, but Wickley waved him back again, sharply.

"Just a minute. One of us will go in after that—but he'll have another job too."

"What's that?"

"That fellow has to be bumped off."

There was a deep silence. Allan smiled, as if in perplexity, but it was plain that he was ill at ease. The negro frowned.

"Ain' no use killin' him 'at I kin see," he drawled, doubtfully.

"Can't you see what happens if we take his money and leave him? He'll get away, or somebody'll find him here. There'll be cops here on the hunt for us before very long. He'll tell 'em we were here, and they're right after us. That's the first reason. The second—"

Allan, who had been gazing shrewdly at him during this speech, leaned forward. Wickley had not fooled him. He realized that the Hawk had more behind his purpose than the specious explanation he had given. Wickley, in his turn, seeing no signs of conviction, had determined to lay his cards on the table.

"The second reason," he said softly, "is that he has an alibi for Durant."

Despair fell upon Durant, lying in the corner. He knew, then, that Wickley had overheard their conversation; and a feeling of incredulous horror came over him as he realized the Hawk's plan. With Conley alive, Allan and the Hawk were no longer safe; with Conley dead, Durant would still be deemed the slayer of Dupuk. In a daze, he scarcely heard Allan's quick, eager questions—the smooth, calm replies of Wickley, as the Hawk explained the situation to the long-armed man.

"No—we've got to kill him," concluded Wickley, his lips in a thin, twisted line.

"Wheah yo' git dis we stuff?" demanded Briggs.

Wickley turned on him.

"If we get the money, we gotta kill him."

Briggs realized that this was tantamount to a threat that if he did not propose to share in the blame they would not permit him to share in the loot. His dull mind grasped this fact, and when he thought of the money—three or four thousand dollars, Wickley had said—he nodded slowly. He realized that the death of Conley would be more to the interests of the other two than to himself, but cupidity overcame discretion. "Ev'body goin' to soak him at oncet?" he asked, flashing his teeth in a grin.

"No. We take our chances."

Allan still looked dubious. He did not like the idea, yet he realized that Wickley was right; that as long as Conley lived the real murderer of Dupuk was not safe. But the matter of murder—in this manner. It was different, in the case of Dupuk. There had been provocation. This was cold-blooded. He was cowardly, although he had always tried to put up a bold front before Wickley, and now he tried to appear cynical.

"What are you waitin' for?" shot out Wickley suddenly. "You're not gettin' yellow about it, are you?"

He crouched forward across the table, his face within a few inches of Allan's pale countenance. The little man licked his lips apologetically.

"No, no," he answered hastily. "Of course not. I'm in on it. I didn't think I had to tell you."

"That's better," grunted Wickley, and sank back. "We all take our chances on it, I said."

"How come?" asked Briggs.

Deliberately Wickley reached into a coat pocket and withdrew an old envelope. He removed the letter that was within, cast it into the fireplace and then began to tear the envelope into small pieces.

There were four slips of paper. Wickley produced a pencil, picked up the slips, and then retired to a dark corner of the room. He returned, the bits of paper in his hand, and tossed them into his hat, which lay on the table.

Then he picked up the hat and, placing his palm over it, shook it vigorously back and forth.

Allan smiled nervously. Durant watched the scene, fascinated, hardly understanding.

"This is the easiest way out of it," remarked Wickley.

"A sporting proposition," observed Allan uneasily.

"Everybody's in on it, and everybody's takin' a chance—and everybody shares the money. There's nothing fairer than that, is there?"

"What if there is no money?" objected Allan faintly.

"The one that gets the job to do can frisk him for the money first. If there's no coin, he doesn't have to go ahead. But there is money. I know it. These fur-buyers always carry scads of money—cash money—"

"CASH money," grunted the negro with animation.

"One of these pieces of paper," announced Wickley, "has a cross on it. The others are blank. The one that gets the cross does the job—" He paused. "With that!"

There was a sharp sound, as he placed the revolver in the center of the table. Allan and the negro gazed at it, silently.

"We'll give our young friend here a chance, too," said Wickley humorously, indicating Durant by a nod of his head. "Mebbe he'll have the pleasure of knockin' off the gent who can give him an alibi."

Briggs laughed uproariously at this conceit, and Allan smiled, a little regretfully. Wild hope surged in Durant's heart, although he could scarcely credit the folly of this proposal. Once let him get his hands on that revolver.

But that had only been Wickley's jest. He had no intention of permitting Durant a draw, although his remark had the momentary effect of dissipating any lingering suspicions the others may have had. Suddenly he pushed the hat forward to Allan, gazing directly into the long-armed man's blue eyes.

"There," he snapped. "Take your pick. The nigger comes next. Me next."

Allan blinked, hesitated, wavered a moment, and then, under the spell of that dominating gaze, reached slowly toward the hat.

"If I get the cross—"

"You bump that bird off. Come on, draw a paper."

Allan stretched forth a bony hand into the hat, and then drew out one of the little pieces of paper, crushing it convulsively.

"Well, what did you get?" demanded Wickley eagerly.

Slowly Allan opened his palm, and stared at the crumpled bit of paper. His mild eyes widened.

"He got it," drawled Briggs, sighing with relief.

"First crack out of the box," said Wickley, tossing the hat into a corner.

Allan said nothing. He fumbled at the piece of paper, held it to the light—looked at it again ruefully. There was a crude, pencil-marked cross on the white surface. Then he shivered, and looked toward the closed door of the back room.

"Now," said Wickley, with finality, as he pushed the revolver toward Allan. "No time like the present."

Durant, pulsing with horror, saw Allan rise from the box and grasp the weapon. He picked it up, gazed at it and then looked again at the closed door.

"It's gotta be done," encouraged Wickley. "You drew the cross."

Allan smiled at him. The smile was meant to be nonchalant, but it was sickly, and he shuffled across the room, the revolver hanging limply in his grasp. However, as he neared the door, his shoulders straightened. Durant, who had hoped that the man would weaken, saw that movement with a feeling of the most intense despair. He felt a curious weakness pervading his body, as he saw Allan take a firm, determined step, saw him grasp the door-knob roughly and fling open the door.

For a moment they had a glimpse of a white face in the gloom of the room, a glimpse of a bound, shadowy figure standing stiffly at the end of the bunks, and then the door closed behind Allan with a sharp clatter.

VIII

WICKLEY leaned across the table, his fingers drumming lightly on the surface, and gazed at the door. Yellow teeth pressed down upon his lower lip, betraying the tension of his nerves. He had planned boldly and swiftly.

It was the Hawk who had slain Dupuk, and now, in the death of Conley, he would at once rid himself of the only witness of Durant's innocence, and make Allan, sole witness of his crime, a murderer as well. That was double protection.

Double protection— The phrase ran through his mind— Double protection.

The silence was profound. Briggs had not moved. Durant, his fingers clenched, lay still and staring in his corner.

They gazed at the door.

The seconds passed. From the other room there was no sound.

The fire crackled loudly, and the noise shattered the oppressive stillness with a force that smote their taut nerves.

Their eyes were riveted on the door. It was blank, inscrutable. Its crude, heavy panels seemed to exercise upon them a terrific and awful fascination.

Still no sound from the room.

Briggs, the whites of his eyes gleaming in the firelight, shifted uneasily in his chair, and cleared his throat.

"Listen!" whispered Wickley, harshly.

The negro crouched, rigid, his mouth open, his eyes fixed on the door. Wickley, motionless, leaned far across the table, his hawk-like visage frozen into a terrible calm. Durant lay impotent under a smothering sense of impending disaster. His mind was a confusion of hopes, doubts and deadly fears. His thoughts tumbled over one another. He convinced himself that Allan lacked even the false courage necessary to commit the deed. He listened in agony for any sound from beyond the door. He dwelt on his own plight when Conley, his last, his only hope, should die. He caught himself studying, with curious abstraction, the hard lines of Wickley's face—the dancing shadows the firelight cast upon the walls—

There was a dull murmur from beyond the door. It was a voice, but the words, the tones, were muffled. Then, sharply, a curse, and a flurry of words.

The sounds died away, and seemed to mingle imperceptibly with a faint roar of the flames, which rose up brightly at that moment and then subsided again. The silence was more profound than before.

"Ain't he gwine t'do it?" mumbled the negro fretfully.

Wickley silenced him with a sudden gesture of his lank hand.

Drawn by a common and irresistible magnet, their eyes again turned to the door, the blank door which guarded the secret of the room with its somber vacuity. By an illusion of the firelight and the desperate intensity of their own inspection, it seemed to grow larger, to tower above them, to assume a blankness more terrible and solemn.

The murmur rose again. Briggs started, convulsively, and then clutched at the edge of the table.

In the dim light their motionless figures were like statues. The uncanny fascination of the door held them spellbound. They stared at it in rising terror, and even Wickley suddenly became very agitated. It had been a long time, he thought. But perhaps it had not been very long. Only a few seconds, no doubt, and the suspense had exaggerated his impression.

The murmur ceased. They waited. Heavy was the silence. Even the fire appeared to cower within itself, for the flames fell and the shadows deepened.

The shot!

Savagely, it ripped the stillness into shreds, and its hollow, reverberating echoes surged in a muffled turmoil from beyond the door.

They leaped, quivered violently, then subsided, trembling, their eyes still fixed on the blank panels.

Wickley's thin lips twitched. The negro blinked, gulped and shuffled his feet.

The door moved, then swung swiftly open and Allan glided out. Their seeking eyes caught a momentary glimpse of a dim figure, limp and bound to the upright post, the head sunk upon the breast. Allan closed the door behind him.

His pale face was working convulsively. In one hand he carried the revolver, wisps of smoke trailing from it, and over one arm dangled a heavy leathern belt, bulging with money.

IX

"WELL," said Wickley, easily. "That's over."

He reached out for the money belt. Mechanically Allan handed it to him. The negro's eyes gleamed, for the belt was bulky. Allan sat down upon the box again, and gazed sullenly at the door.

Wickley did not open the belt. It lay on the table before him, and he patted it with his lank fingers. He smiled his twisted smile as he regarded Allan.

"What's the matter?" he asked, bruskly. "Shakes you up, does it? What have you to fear?"

Allan shrugged his shoulders and smiled weakly.

"We've got the money. We have a gun. We have Conley's sleigh, the dogs and a pair of snowshoes. We've got rid of our cuffs, and we're clear of the cops. What more could you want? Are you afraid? There's nothing to be afraid of. In the morning we clear out. We'll leave our young friend here—" he cast a glance back at Durant, white-faced and silent, in the corner, "and let him look out for himself."

"No," shouted Allan, suddenly, half rising from his seat. "That won't do—"

Wickley smiled evilly.

"Why? We won't keep him tied up. He can make a getaway if he wants to. But he can't come with us. We can't trust him. If he gets away, all right; so much the better for him. If he is caught, so much the worse. He hasn't an alibi any more."

Wickley laughed harshly.

"No, his alibi's gone. Don't fear—he won't stick around here, with that fellow —" he nodded to the door—"in there. If they find him here, it'll look too bad for him. They'll have to blame some one, and he'll be most convenient. They'll say he bumped off Conley, threw away the gun and hid the money. They won't believe him if he says you did it—"

Allan shivered.

"No. He must come with us," he insisted stubbornly.

"What's got into you?" demanded Wickley, angrily. "I tell you he can't come with us. It's better for all of us that we let him take his own chances. If they do catch us —which they won't—we can shove the blame on him anyway. It's three to one."

Allan seemed agitated.

"But he must come with us. It isn't safe to leave him here."

"I say he can't come with us," shouted Wickley, fiercely. "Isn't that enough for you?"

Allan opened his mouth as if to speak, then thought better of it. Something was weighing on his mind. Durant was puzzled. He knew that Allan was not particularly solicitous regarding him. But he listened apathetically.

He faced a stone wall. With Conley gone, all hope of proving his innocence of Dupuk's murder had vanished. If he stayed, he would be recaptured and convicted. If he took his chances on flight, he would be further convincing the authorities of his guilt, leaving himself open to accusation of Conley's death, and his chances of escape were, in any case, of the slimmest. Truly, Wickley had planned shrewdly.

"How 'bout dat money?" demanded Briggs heavily.

"We'll divvy up when we're safe outta here," said Wickley, calmly. "I'm not taking any chance on one of you taking his share and clearing out alone."

The negro looked disappointed, then suspicious, and for a moment he appeared on the verge of protesting. Wickley reached for the revolver, which Allan still held in his hand. The little man gave it up without demur. Briggs subsided. Smiling, Wickley put the weapon in the pocket of his coat.

"We may need this," he said. "Let's turn in. We gotta be outta here first thing in the morning."

He went over to Conley's sleeping-bag, which was lying on the floor, picked it up, and tossed it over to Allan.

"I guess that's coming to you," he said. "Briggs and I can sleep on the floor. I'll keep the fire going."

He picked up a log of wood from a pile beside the hearth and threw it into the fireplace. Then, taking off his overcoat, he rolled it up and placed it under his head for a pillow. Lying on the floor, he gazed into the fire.

Briggs, mumbling to himself, curled up in a dark corner. Allan crawled into the sleeping-bag.

* * *

DURANT could not sleep. He was shaken by the events of the evening, and by realization of his own plight. There was no way out. He was helpless, inextricably entangled in a net of circumstances. Dully he regarded the lank figure of Wickley, lying in the firelight. He realized too greatly the futility of hatred, to feel more than an overwhelming resentment against the man.

The night wore on. The storm seemed to have died down, for gusts of snow no longer slashed against the window panes. From the far corner he could hear the snores of the negro.

Hours went by. Once in a while, Wickley would rouse himself and place another log on the fire. Durant watched him, through half-closed eyelids.

At last, on one of these excursions, Wickley did not resume his place by the fire. He went over into the corner, on tiptoe, and stood for a moment over the inert figure of the negro. Briggs snored on, and Wickley, apparently satisfied, left him, and went over to Allan. He stood there for a while, nodded his head in approval when he saw the regular rise and fall of the sleeping-bag, indicating that Allan, too, was sound asleep, and then he came over to Durant. Quickly, he closed his eyes, and simulated slumber.

He sensed that the Hawk was standing over him, regarding him intently, but he did not open his eyes, and finally he heard Wickley's receding footsteps. Cautiously, he peered out and saw Wickley pick up his coat from the floor and put it on. The Hawk looked about him, undecidedly, for a moment, then stepped over to the wall and picked up a dark object. It was the hat, which he had cast on the floor after the fatal draw. Three little slips of white paper fluttered to the floor and lay in the light of the fire.

Wickley glided noiselessly over to the door. Carefully, he opened it, looked behind again and since there was no movement, slipped quietly outside. The door closed behind him, without a sound.

Durant sleepily wondered at these maneuvres. His eyes fell on the slips of paper, lying before the fireplace. He regarded them without interest and then he began to stare.

On each little slip, he discerned a cross.

* * *

FOR a moment, the import of this discovery eluded him, and then he smiled grimly, as he realized the trick that had been played on Allan. Unwilling to commit the crime himself, Wickley had tricked his companion into commission of the deed. All the slips were marked, and Allan had been given the first draw. It was a scheme quite typical of the astute and unscrupulous Hawk. Allan had been the dupe.

His thoughts were interrupted by a sound from the rear of the building. He recognized it as the snarling of dogs, and then came a low and impatient voice. There was a rattle of harness.

Swiftly he realized Wickley's intention. The Hawk was making good his escape, leaving his companions behind. He had the money, and now he was double-crossing the two who had helped him obtain it. He had the revolver, he had Conley's sleigh and dogs. Durant felt a sense of satisfaction. It would serve Briggs and Allan well if they were victimized in this manner.

But then a plan began to form in his mind. Could he not turn this knowledge to his own purpose? If he could but ally himself with Briggs, would they not be able to overcome Wickley and Allan? The thought came to him that he might even rouse Allan against the Hawk, but he rejected it. He would tell Allan nothing—he would not give such a chance to that man, who had killed Conley. He wanted a victory over both Allan and the Hawk, and there was a chance that by stirring up Briggs against the betrayer he would be able to accomplish that victory.

He got to his feet with difficulty and made his way cautiously across the room. His hands were still bound behind his back, and when he reached the negro, he knelt down and nudged the sleeping man with his elbow.

Briggs had been sleeping soundly. He stirred, muttered, opened his eyes slowly, then sat up, gazing about him, bewildered.

"Who dat?" he asked, frightened.

Durant cautioned him to be silent.

"Wickley's double-crossing you," he told Briggs tensely, in a low voice. "He's going to make a getaway. He's outside hitching up the dogs now."

Briggs blinked, not comprehending at first, but at last his dull face hardened, and he stumbled to his feet, with an oath.

"Be quiet," whispered Durant. "Allan's asleep. If you'll untie me, I'll help you."

"Ah'll kill dat Wickley," mumbled Briggs, fiercely, but he bent, and fumbled at the bonds about Durant's wrists. "Ah'll kill him—"

He cursed Wickley in sibilant whispers, as the cords fell loose.

Exultation mounted in Durant's heart as he felt his wrists come free. He now had an ally, and if all went well, they would overcome both Wickley and Allan. It was his intention to make full use of the opportunity to secure the revolver, for he knew that in its possession lay control of the situation.

"He's out hitching up the dogs now," he whispered to Briggs. "He's got the money—"

At mention of the money, the negro's great fists clenched, and his lips drew back from his white teeth in a snarl. Durant had struck the right note with the black man. Swiftly, quietly, they got up and crossed the room, and stood by the door, listening. Briggs' face showed his anger, as they heard the slight noises outside which indicated that Wickley was indeed preparing for flight.

"We'll sneak out on him. Come at him from around the house—" began Durant, when suddenly he saw the negro's mouth open, and Briggs pointed, staring. He followed the direction of the negro's alarmed gaze.

Allan, wide-eyed, was sitting up in his sleeping blanket, awakened by the noise.

"Wickley!" he shouted.

DURANT saw his whole plan shattered by that loud, frightened cry. Briggs was aghast, realizing that the Hawk was warned, and that the warning was sufficient. They could not hope to take him by surprize now.

Durant moved swiftly. With a sudden inspiration, he strode to the fireplace, swooped upon the three slips of paper lying there, and crossed over to Allan, opening his mouth for a second shout.

"Look!" he commanded. "Look at that! Are you with him now? He fooled you into shooting Conley, because he didn't dare do it himself. Fooled you, do you hear? Every paper had a cross. You didn't have a chance!"

Allan, stupefied, stared at the papers, and then an incredulous look crossed his pale face, and was replaced by an expression of furious astonishment.

"It's true!" he gasped. "It's true! They all have crosses. He tricked me!"

"And now he's out there hitching up the dogs, trying to make a getaway. Double-crossing you—double-crossing both of you," snapped Durant.

Allan scarcely seemed to hear. He turned the bits of paper over and over in his shaking fingers, white with fury.

"I'll pay him out for this," he muttered. "I'll pay him out—"

There was a heavy footstep on the veranda. Allan subsided, quickly, and motioned to the others for silence.

"What's the matter?" came Wickley's voice sullenly, from beyond the door.

"Nothing — nothing," replied Allan, shrewdly. "I woke up and found you gone. What are you doing?"

"It's time for us all to start," came back the voice, after a while. "I was hitching up the dogs."

The door opened, and Wickley entered.

X

SCARCELY had he stepped across the threshold than Briggs sprang at him. He hurled his great bulk at the lean form of the Hawk with terrific force, and Wickley went staggering back. His hand sprang to his coat pocket, and the revolver was out in a twinkling; but the fury of the negro's onslaught sent him crashing against the wall and the weapon flew from his grasp, discharging at the same time. The bullet was imbedded in the floor. Durant, who had not expected this sudden appearance of the revolver, swerved toward it, but it clattered across the floor, directly in front of Allan, and the little man seized it.

Wickley and the negro went crashing to the floor, and the black man knelt upon him savagely, his knees digging into the Hawk's chest. He grasped Wickley's arms, and the man was powerless, although he squirmed and twisted helplessly about.

"Now," shrilled Allan, turning the revolver upon him. "You thought you'd fool us, eh, Wickley? Thought you'd fool us. And you thought you'd fooled me, didn't you? With the bits of paper. Every one with a cross. A clever trick, wasn't it?"

Wickley, pinned upon his back, stammered something, unintelligibly, and Allan, covering him with the revolver, went on, his thin voice high with wrath and excitement.

"You wanted me to kill Conley, didn't you? Because you were afraid of me as long as I knew you killed Dupuk. You were afraid of me, that's why. You put it over on me with the slips of paper, eh, Wickley? You put it over me there."

Durant edged closer, his eye on the revolver. He wanted the weapon, and he meditated a sudden dash, anything to secure it for himself, for he knew he could expect little help from Allan, as long as the long-armed man possessed the gun. Once in his own hands, their own quarrels would mean little to him for he would have them at his mercy. Allan rattled on—

"You thought you'd have something on me if you fixed it so I'd have to kill Conley. I couldn't squeal on you, because you'd squeal on me. That was it, eh?"

Under cover of the little man's high words, Wickley, on his back, whispered swiftly to the negro—

"Fifty-fifty with you if you let me up. Half the money. We'll clear out together."

The negro heard, and understood. After all, the money was his only concern. His resentment against Wickley had vanished now that the Hawk was in his power and that he was assured of his share of the loot. Also, he was nervous because Allan was in possession of the gun. It was pointed at him in a most disconcerting manner.

"Fifty—fifty," he muttered.

"I'll split with you," whispered Wickley, tensely. "Get the gun from him, some way."

Durant heard the whispering. He knew he could not trust the negro and he knew he had no time to waste. Suddenly, he wrenched the weapon from the grasp of the startled Allan. He dashed back; but the little man, with a cry, flung his long arms about Durant's ankles, and he was brought heavily to the floor. At the same time, the negro rose to his feet, releasing Wickley, and the two, now allied, hurled themselves upon Allan and Durant.

Desperately, Durant hugged the revolver to him. He lay face down, upon the floor, and he was conscious of floundering arms and legs all about him, heavy bodies, grunts, oaths, savage blows. One of the negro's fists crashed into his ribs, and he gasped with the pain. He tried to bring up the revolver, to shoot into the mass of bodies above him, but no sooner had it emerged than a heavy foot trod crushingly upon his hand. It was agonizing. His fingers released their hold, the revolver was snatched from his grasp, and then he heard Wickley's voice, harsh and triumphant—

"Now! Now! The whole pack of you! Put 'em up! Put 'em up, or I'll drill you—"

Briggs scrambled off, and Allan, shaking with fear, rose to his feet, his hands high above his head. Durant, tasting the bitterness of defeat in the hour of victory, stumbled from the floor. Wickley stood in the center of the room, his face fierce with conquest, the revolver in his grasp.

"I'll teach you," he rasped, bitterly. "I'll teach you to turn on me—"

"Mah Lawd!" gasped Briggs, in a ghastly voice.

The negro was standing a little to one side of Wickley, and he was facing the door. The Hawk, whose back was to the door, wheeled about, when he saw the stare of astonishment, saw the incredulity and utter fear depicted on the negro's face. Even as he turned, a voice rang out sharply from the door—

"Drop that gun, Wickley!"

IT WAS Conley, and he stood beyond the doorway, in the shadows of the veranda, like a vague, dark ghost; but his voice rang out sternly, and there was uncompromising reality in the high-power rifle with which he covered the Hawk.

Even as Conley spoke, Wickley ducked and, in the same instant, shot. It was a desperate chance, and only in that same flickering instant did he realize that the other man held him at his mercy. The bullet went wide, and with the bark of the revolver came the sharp crack of the rifle.

The Hawk slumped to his knees, then sprawled forward on the floor, the revolver still clutched in his outstretched hand. He shuddered convulsively and was still. Allan stared, aghast, his arms raised, and when he realized that Wickley was dead, he began to babble, fearfully.

"He thought he'd fooled me. He thought he tricked me—with the pieces of paper—"

"Conley!" gasped Durant, in relief, stepping forward. "He didn't kill you!" He could scarcely credit his senses in this miraculous reappearance of the man he had thought slain, who had in one swift instant turned the tables upon the Hawk and had put an end forever to all his evil schemes.

"I look alive, don't I?" grinned Conley, as he curtly motioned Allan and Briggs over before the fire, still covering them with the rifle. He stepped over the prone body of Wickley.

"The little fellow, here, didn't have the nerve to do it. And he didn't want Wickley holding a killing over his head, either. So we made a bargain. He fired a shot into the air and I let him have the money—"

"He thought he put one over," muttered Allan, glowering at the body sprawled on the floor. "I fooled him—"

"But you didn't figure I might work my way loose of those infernal ropes and get out the window," said Conley, cheerfully. "And you didn't know I had a rifle on the sleigh. You were pretty smart, but you didn't figure far enough ahead."

He turned to Durant.

"Well, lad," he said, "I guess we can look after these two here, and see that they don't cause any more trouble tonight. We'll take 'em back to town in the morning, if the cops don't come this way by then."

Briggs, his arms still raised, was impassive, and he eyed the rifle with respect. Allan's eyes were still upon the Hawk, as though in death he still feared that sinister and unscrupulous master.

"He killed Dupuk," he cried. "It wasn't me. They can't blame it on me—"

"You can tell that to the police," said Conley. "I guess when you've talked for a while they'll be glad enough to set the lad here free again. And after that, he's comin' into the fur business with me. Durant, boy, quit lookin' as though you've seen a ghost, and get them ropes from the bunk, that they had for tyin' me up with. We'll see how they like it themselves."

The ISLAND OF FRANCE

by

Albert Richard Wetjen ~

Author of "Ho-Ho-Ho!" "Exactly," etc.

IT'S queer how we start out in life with some definite goal in view, some queer desire or ambition that we are willing to fight for, starve for, work for and sometimes die for. It may be a woman, or a farm in the foothills, or a ship or some other equally preposterous thing. You can never tell, you never know what the other fellow really wants, what he lies awake at night thinking about. But you can bet it's something he'll never get, some entirely preposterous dream that may not be laughed at, may not be understood, and yet is the driving force behind the very soul. Captain Blakeney's island was like that, a preposterous dream, not to be laughed at, not to be understood, but yet the driving force behind the immense soul of the man.

I met him first in a rather haphazard way. I'd been paid off in Camp Town from a barkentine occupied with the sugar trade in Mauritius. She'd sideswiped a Union-Castle boat off Port Elisabeth and had been towed in to dry-dock for extensive repairs. That threw the crew out of work and we drifted one by one into other jobs.

I, personally, claimed that I was finished with the sea. It held no future. It was too exacting and hard. I went up the coast to Durban and after a week or two I got a berth on one of the gasoline ferries that run from Durban proper to the Bluff. Not a bad job. I had the night shift and used to work up to about two in the morning, my last loads usually being drunken sailors returning from town to their ships lying under the coaling chutes.

I wasn't particularly in love with it, not after being a deep-water man. But it happened that I had a rather queer ambition at that time to be an up-country trader and I wanted to stay ashore and save money so that I could finance myself. I was boarding at Mother Plook's, down the shore of the Bluff and about half a mile back from the whaling station. We could get a whiff of whale reek from that station when the wind was right and you had to smoke pretty hard to save yourself from choking to death. Mother was a stout, good-natured woman with gray hair and a very red face. She ran a sort of private bar and she could always get hold of a few girls if any of her lodgers wanted to throw a party and felt lonesome.

The lodgers were mostly bachelor skippers waiting over between voyages, or young men from the whaling station and the harbor service. Occasionally a trader from the interior drifted in, sat around silently smoking and drinking for a while and then left again. I always used to think that these traders, being so long out on the veldt with only black boys, wanted to slowly break themselves in on their return to civilization. That is, they set around Mother Plook's for a few days getting used to white men again, then drifted over to the town proper. I used to spend many hours getting information from them, with the eye, of course, to the time when I myself would buy oxen and wagons and start trading. But Captain Blakeney—

I saw him several times around Mother Plook's, and said good morning or good evening to him before I even knew what his name was. He used to swagger in the dining-room to midday dinner, the first meal of the day I was on deck to eat, and he was a great bull of a man. He had a bellowing, riotous sort of laugh, a short fan-shaped brown beard, wide gray eyes set in a heavily tanned face, and shoulders that simply bulged with muscle. He was the sort of man you could picture sailing under the skull-and-crossbones, a regular pirate. He talked like a pirate too. His mouth always full of oaths, white teeth flashing from between his beard. He used to hammer with hairy fists on any object near him to emphasize his point. A strange man. I understood his mother was French and his father an Englishman.

Mostly the other captains would listen to him silently, or venture only a muttered word or so, and the rest of us, who were not shipmasters, watched him open-mouthed when he talked. He had plenty to talk about. He was master and owner of the brig *White Falcon*. He was engaged mostly in the Island trade but had come to Africa against his will with a cargo of copra that was ultimately destined for Port Sunlight. I understood that he wouldn't have left his Islands if it hadn't chanced that he was on a charter and not his own boss for a while. That was changed now, he assured us, hammering on the dinner table. The charter was ended and he blanked-blanked if he'd ever get tied up with another. The Islands for him. And speaking of islands, had any of them ever heard of "my Island of France?"

He stopped when he said that, stopped dead, his fists poised to hammer the table, his face beaming, his eyes alight, moving sharply from one man to the other.

There was a sort of tense silence. I looked curiously at my companions and was surprized that most of the older men had stopped eating and were gazing at Blakeney as though fascinated. The younger men, like myself, were merely curious, unstirred by the words, though I personally did have a vague memory of having heard the name before. Then Hutchinson, an old, white-haired skipper of the whaling fleet, said slowly—

"You're not looking for that, Captain?"

Blakeney exploded in a roar of laughter. He hammered on the table.

"Hah! Why do you all look so? Is it not an old tale in the Islands? What else should I look for? Gold, pearls, and the treasure of La Pérouse!"

Hutchinson shook his head and smiled. The others shook their heads and smiled. I saw that the younger men, with me, were looking stupidly from Blakeney to Hutchinson and back. Yet their foreheads were creased as if the name, Island of France, was in some way familiar. We had heard it somewhere, the youngsters among us. It was a legend, or a wild tale, a sort of deep-water yarn that the forecastle gossiped about.

A gray-haired captain named Herman brought it all back to me, and perhaps to the others, for I saw their faces clear, though their eyes remained curious.

"A lot of men have looked for it, Blakeney. The Island of France is an old story, something like the fabled land of Ophir. I suppose we've all thought about it when we've been sailing near Vanikoro. But I guess it's nothing but an old wives' tale."

"Wrong!" bellowed Blakeney, laughing in his throat. "Wrong, Herman. You are an old man and the blood runs no more hotly through you. Listen to me. My mother's father was Pierre Lafitte and he was—"

There was the scrape of a chair. At least four of the older seamen had risen from the table, astonished, rigid, and among them were Hutchinson and Herman. Herman croaked—yes that is the word—he croaked:

"Pierre Lafitte? You mean t' say that yarn's true?"

"Why Pierre Lafitte—so it's said—"

"Yes," roared Blakeney, shaking with laughter at their surprize. "Pierre Lafitte was wrecked on the Island of France for two years. And he was my grandfather. The tale is true. But that does not make the finding easier."

He finished with an amused shrug. He was beaming again immediately, flourishing hairy hands before the transfixed company. He talked as if he was all Latin, his colder Anglo-Saxon half submerged.

"Yet it is a great search, my friends. It is there somewhere, in the big Pacific, and some one will find it some day. And that man will be rich. I have looked and looked, and gone far out of my course searching, and when my cargoes took me away from the Islands I have always itched to go back and search again. I sail the day after next for Colombo and then down into the Pacific once more. I tell you some one, some day will find it."

He drank coffee noisily and then, as if suddenly aware he had forgotten to eat, he picked up knife and fork and attacked his cold, laden plate with extreme vigor. There was that about the man—he had extreme vigor. Everything he did he put his heart into. You could understand it a bit when you considered his heritage. French mother and English father, fire from one and obstinacy from the other.

The captains who had been standing sat down as if pulled by a string, finished their meal in utter silence and passed thoughtfully out on to Mother Plook's wide veranda to smoke and stare unseeing over the rolling slopes of the Bluff. Lord knows what they were thinking about. I never saw any of them so quiet. They were a bunch of garrulous old men as a rule, but this talk of the Island of France seemed to have dried them up completely.

I hitched my chair closer to old Herman and offered him my pouch. He took it with a grunt and tapped out his battered long pipe. The bowl was carved in Japan and the stem was an albatross' wing bones fastened with glue and Spanish half-hitched over. Then he filled it slowly with my tobacco.

I STARTED abruptly:

"I've heard something about the place. Supposed to be fabulously rich isn't it? I mean the Island of France."

Herman chuckled and tapped his nose with the stem of his pipe.

"So you want to look for it too?" he suggested, half serious, half joking.

I denied that implication. He smoked for a while.

"'Tis a yarn that was talked of a lot when I was young," he said at last, soberly, with his memories surging uppermost. "Yes, when I was young every sailor in the Pacific looked for the Island of France. But I thought that foolishness had gone, and it must be fifteen or twenty years since I heard a man name the place."

He nodded his head and the lids narrowed thoughtfully over hard blue eyes.

"I've always thought 'twas a focsle yarn, but if Blakeney's grandfather was Pierre Lafitte there might be something in it. I never believed before that Pierre Lafitte existed, t' tell the truth. Never mind. This Pierre Lafitte, a long time ago, in 1827 or 1828, I think, was supposed to have been one of the crew of the *Research*, a packet commanded by a Captain Dillon and sent by the East India Company to find La Pérouse. La Pérouse was a frog explorer who poked round the Islands back in seventeen something and disappeared, probably cut off. I'm not strong on the details.

"Well, Captain Dillon and Pierre Lafitte found the wrecks of the Frenchman's ships on Vanikoro, that's way up in the Santa Cruz Islands. Never found a survivor. 'Pears though that the natives told some yarn about a ship's boat being sent by the wrecked Frogs to get help. But the boat never came back and was never heard from again. 'Tis said it carried all La Pérouse's gold and jewels with which it was supposed to hire help if none could be got any other way. That's all right so far. It don't sound too raw.

"The *Research* went back to India with what relics she'd picked up, and the crew was disbanded. The yarn goes that this Lafitte got curious about the missing boat and the jewels and such, and getting hold of a ship of his own he went trading in the Islands. They must 've been tough to trade in those days, though the pickings were rich. Anyway, this Lafitte is supposed to have looked about him and asked at every island he came to, but he never found no trace of this lost French longboat. He made a lot of money trading, though, and that was as good as any treasure if you ask me, and a lot more certain.

"Then one voyage, up near Vanikoro, Lafitte's ship ran into a blow, got dismantled and had to run before it for three days. Then she drifted a bit and floundered. Lafitte and two other men got away in the boat and were at sea for two days more. At last they sighted an island and made a landing. I've always heard that this island had two hills with a valley between, looking like a saddle if you came up to it from the east or west and just like one hill if you saw it from the north or south. I don't know. I never found the place. But that's a tale, like a saddle.

"This Lafitte lived there two years or thereabouts, and according to the yarn he told a skipper named Maddison he found all the people on the island were half-caste French and that they were the sons and daughters of that lost longboat full of Frenchmen. Funny, ain't it, if it's true, how Lafitte searched all his life for them and at last got wrecked right on the doorstep, so t' speak? Anyway, he's supposed t' have married one of the women and settled down to try and build a ship to make his escape in. According to the yarn, he found the natives all decorated with the jewels of La Pérouse and all owning gold dishes and pots and pans and —— knows what else besides. Likely enough it's overdone. But he also claimed there was a lagoon in the island and the natives had brought up some whopping big pearls. Lafitte and his two surviving men brought up the rest, pretty well stripped the lagoon, if I'm any judge, and from the yarn. All right.

"Then one day Lafitte goes out fishing in a canoe with his wife and they get blown to sea by a squall. You know how such things spring up in those waters—and by the time it was calm again they was too far away from the island to get back. They must have drifted a long time without any water or food and at last they were picked up by a whaler called the *Dunstan Miller* with a skipper named Maddison. Lafitte was about dead then and so was his woman. He wrote a lot of notes and gave them to Maddison to send to a daughter somewhere in France. He told Maddison the whole yarn, except where the island was which he didn't have no more idea of himself, and then up and died. The woman died, too, and Maddison, I guess, dumped them overboard, figuring they were both loony with the sun and no water. That's all I know. Maddison, I suppose, sent the papers to France. Probably couldn't read 'em, anyway. And he talked about the whole matter to other skippers, I suppose, and so it got around. Some of them took it serious and went to look for the gold and jewels and pearls. Some of 'em jest laughed and stuck to honest trading. I first went into th' Pacific in '79 and th' yarn was an old-timer then. Maybe it's true, and if this Pierre Lafitte was a real man, I guess it is. But that don't make the place easier to find."

"I should say not," roared a voice, and Blakeney stood there beaming down and gesturing at us. "You've got the tale pretty straight, Herman. And it's true. My father married Pierre Lafitte's daughter and I have seen the papers. They all thought Pierre was mad when he wrote them, but not I. No. I believed and I have looked for the Island of France."

I was intently curious and I asked—

"What did the papers say?"

"Hah!" bellowed Blakeney, chuckling. "So the fever takes you too— No, they did not say where the island was. How should they? Pierre did not know himself. But he tells which way he drifted and what his last 'sight' was. And even that does not give the island. I know. I have sailed over his track and he has made a mistake somewhere. Or perhaps he figured the drift wrong, perhaps he went mad for days and did not remember those days afterwards. But I shall find it. It is there, somewhere in the big Pacific, and then I shall be a rich man."

He chuckled again and bellowed with laughter, rubbing his hands heartily and desisting for a moment to slap me on the back with enough force to make me well nigh fall from the chair and gasp for breath. Then he left us and went upstairs and we could hear his bull's voice joking with Mother Plook.

It was late the next morning when Blakeney spoke to me again. I had come off the ferry at 1:30, leaving it tied under the boatshed ready for the morning man to take over at six o'clock, and had gone to my room for some sleep. At 10:30 I was downstairs, having bathed and shaved and climbed into some whites, it being December and confoundedly hot. There was a white canvas hammock on the veranda and I got hold of a magazine, lighted up my pipe and settled down to idle the time until dinner.

Presently Blakeney came blundering up on the veranda from the pathway that led down the hill to the narrow gauge railroad along which the whales were carried to the station. He stood and regarded me with care, as if noticing me for the first time, as perhaps he actually was. He had his hands on his hips and his fan-shaped beard sunk on his chest. His wide gray eyes were thoughtful.

"Well," he said at last. "I'd like to talk to you, young fellow."

I looked up at him and told him to go ahead and that I had all the time until dinner to waste. Pretty cheeky, but then he wasn't my skipper—yet.

"You've got a second mate's papers!" he boomed at me loudly, almost as if he was accusing me of some crime.

I laid away my magazine and nodded, lazily tucking one arm under my head and gazing up at the big man. I was interested in him, quite ready to listen to what he had to say, and I had, as I have said, several hours to waste before dinner, and further hours before I went on my ferry shift.

"How long you been to sea? In sail? Do you know the Pacific?"

I answered him in order:

"Eight years. Six in sail. I've traded three times in the Islands."

He grunted, "Good." Then, frowning and fingering his beard—

"Full-riggers?"

I shook my head.

"Barks and barkentines," I answered truthfully. "I've never sailed on a ship square-rigged."

"Well, I want a third mate and supercargo."

"I've got a job," I stated indolently. "Thanks all the same."

"I'll pay you standard wages for third mates and a bonus if you'll handle the supercargo's work."

"Thanks. But I like it ashore. Besides I couldn't handle a brig."

He gestured impatiently.

"Oh, you'd soon pick that up. Come on. I'm sailing tomorrow."

"Why don't you go and see the shipping master?" I suggested, curious. I was wondering why a small brig indulged in the luxury of three mates. But I learned afterwards that Blakeney had many ideas of his own about the amount of work a man could do. He confessed once that he was a socialist.

Just now he glared at me and then exploded.

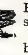
"—— fools! They've all got an idea I'm going off to look for my island." He always called it "my island" as if he had, through his grandfather, some very personal claim to it. He raised his great hairy fists and shook them. "They're laughing at me over there." He jerked his head in the direction of the harbor. "Say I'm crazy. Won't sign on with me. I'll have a job to get a focsle crew."

Now I could understand that. There are captains who get a name for being hard cases, or crazy or queer, and no matter what they do thereafter the name will stick. They have the very hardest job getting men to follow them. Seamen are peculiarly superstitious and obstinate, and if an idea had got around the shipping offices that Blakeney was off on a mad goose chase to look for an island, and was correspondingly crazy, then it was easy to believe that he'd get no crew. I found later that the crew he'd come to Durban with had deserted, officers and all, because of Blakeney's insistence when in the Pacific of always sailing over uncharted area of sea. It had the men scared.

He was thundering on, deep in his throat and scowling horribly:

"I can rake up some men at Dutch Jake's at the last minute, but it'll be hard to get officers. My mate's still aboard, been with me ten years. I can find a second mate, but I need a third and a supercargo. You can handle both jobs."

"Are you really looking for this island?" I interrupted, really fascinated.



HE FROWNED deeply and then suddenly laughed.

"I've always looked for it," he boomed frankly. "I always shall. I'll find it some day. I have a feeling in here." He tapped his chest then and gestured largely. "It's there, somewhere in the big Pacific. My grandfather knew. Think what it's worth! Gold and pearls and jewels. And the French government'd pay almost anything for relics of La Pérouse. Clear up the whole mystery, eh? Of course I look for it."

"Well, I don't think I'd want to sign on," I said. "No, it's not because of the island. But I'm pretty comfortable here."

I stretched luxuriously and yawned. He towered over me like the old time pirate he must have been at heart.

"Bah!" he growled. "You young men

are all alike. You stay ashore and get fat and lazy. You turn your back on the sea. You grow like fat cows because you are afraid of the work and the wind and the danger. What will become of you?"

I answered him, in no way put out, but rather amused:

"I'm thinking of saving enough money to go trading up-country. Then perhaps I'll be able to go home and live in the old village where I came from."

He sniffed. Yes, he actually sniffed his contempt and glared down.

"I thought you were a sailor," he said. "Bah! When I find my island—"

I interrupted him with a laugh.

"Your island! Say, where are you bound for this time?"

He glowered at me, wrath stirring behind his eyes, but he answered fairly enough:

"I've got a cargo for Colombo and from there we'll get to Batavia, where I have a chance to load for Noumea. And after that I shall go north, trading through the Hebrides and the Santa Cruz Islands—Hah! You notice that! The Islands! You have traded before! You can not forget them! Hah!"

He gestured triumphantly. Oh, he was very much the Frenchman at times.

And I was stirred. I was more than stirred. I was uneasy, uneasy that I'd forget all my promises to myself to quit the sea and become a prosperous inland trader. I was through with sea life. I'd sworn to that. It was too pleasant ashore. But when he talked of the Islands, I could picture them again and I could remember them. So clearly. So strangely. The smells, the sights, the sounds. Starlight nights and the wind in the palms, the fires down by the Island villages, the crews singing on the foredeck under the moon. Oh, you know. It all comes back. And it's perfectly true that once you've been through the Islands you never forget them. And I did love the sea, more than I knew, enough so that it eventually held me all my life.

But at that time, on the veranda of Mother Plook's outside of Durban, being twenty-one years old and but a few months ashore from a long voyage and comfortably settled in a good job, I thought I had done with the sea forever, done with the salt, bitter sea that kept a man poor, and then hardened him and battered him and usually killed him in the end. Yes, I thought I was finished. But Blakeney and his talk of the Islands had me uneasy and stirred. I suppose he saw how it was, for he talked on with all the brilliant imagery of the Frenchman, with all the dramatics that a Latin can employ. He could read men, understand what emotions swayed them. I believe he liked me quite a little, and at the same time he did badly need a third mate and a supercargo.

I grew irritated at last, flinging myself from the hammock and standing upright.

"I'll think it over," I told him, and went up to my room.

I could hear his bull's bellow of laughter ringing behind me. He knew, the ——, that he had me going, with all his talk of lost islands and fabulous wealth, with his talk of the Pacific days, trading, and the uproarious nights when a man chanced to be anchored in Papeete or Noumea or Suva with a dozen other windjammers anchored as well and the longboats visiting back and forth. Oh, you know. I think I spent the next two hours overhauling my gear, my seaboots, oilskins, uniform suits. I didn't intend to return to sea, you understand, but I thought it wouldn't hurt to examine my kit.

I signed on next morning in the main cabin of the brig *White Falcon* for a voyage of three years or until the vessel should return to the country of departure.

I never sailed with a more curious man than Captain Blakeney. He was a great upstanding bearded pirate and yet he had a melancholy, gentle side to him that I believe few men ever encountered. I found, queerly enough and much to my surprize, that he apparently did not take his life-long search for the Island of France as seriously as I had believed he did. Yet, in the end, I was wrong even there. He was very practical in many ways, and quite the philosopher.

"Like Pierre Lafitte I made my fortune trading while I look," he boomed at me one day after we'd left Colombo. "The island, it is there, somewhere in the big Pacific. That I know. And it is a dream I have that I will some day stand upon its beaches and trade with the natives for its wealth. Then, hah! I shall see Paris and Marseilles, Rome, Naples and Venice as they should be seen. Yes, I will have a yacht and hire me a captain." He bellowed with laughter. "But first I must find the island."

Another time when I happened to wonder what he'd really do when he found it, he answered me:

"Does that matter? Is it not the finding? Hah! Have you ever brought your ship through a typhoon, short-handed, half-wrecked, sinking? I have. And do you know it is the fighting, the struggle to win against the water and wind. Yes, just that. The struggle it is that matters. After it is over there is no more heart in you, no more swift blood and shouting voice. No. You are glad then to crawl away and sleep. It is the fight. And my island is like that. You understand? I look and seek and dream of it. It is ahead of me always like a star on the rim of the sea, like a port you start for from across the world. When I find it? I do not know."

He laid a hand on my shoulder then, thoughtfully, gently, and his face was sad.

"I think I shall die. There will then be no more laughter in the Pacific, no more fight. I shall not come on deck with the blood in my throat when a man calls that there is land. No. I shall not want to sit all morning in the rigging and peer with my glasses over where the charts say there is no land. Yes, I am afraid that when I find my island I shall die."

That was queer, wasn't it? Looking at it that way. I began to think about it and I began to perceive that Captain Blakeney's island was really to him a dream-thing, a remote land, something to look forward to, something to think about, something to make life a vibrant and eager thing. Yes, that's right. He had his island the same as I had my dream of going home to the village where I was born, going home with a fortune, riding behind two fine horses, scattering largesses to the admiring friends of my youth.

You understand? The longing for that island was comparable to that of our burly, unimaginative mate's for a farm. He wanted to retire from the sea and get a farm on the cliffs, raise potatoes, I think it was. So it goes. I have since known men with the queerest dreams of ultimate happiness, a perfect collection of postage stamps, or butterflies, or women's hair, or something equally absurd. It's the same as a raw, uneducated forecastle hand wanting to be skipper. By George, though, it's what makes the world go round, when you come to think of it. So I began to quite sympathize with Captain Blakeney's island, thinking I fully understood the man. I didn't. You never do.

He was a fine skipper. I never heard him speak an angry word that wasn't deserved. He could punch a man on the jaw or slap him on the back with the same bellow of laughter to accompany the task. A fine man. I'm glad I knew him. I'm glad I sailed with him. He taught me the value of a dream.

THE *White Falcon* went to Batavia and loaded for Noumea. We sailed by way of Makassar and the Torres Strait and then made a big curve to the south and east to raise New Caledonia. After leaving the Torres Strait, Blakeney did not seem to be able to keep still. I don't know when he slept, for he always seemed to be on deck whenever I was awake. I'd relieve the mate at dawn and I'd find Blakeney walking the poop, muttering to himself, sometimes stopping abruptly to sweep the lightening horizon with a fat, leather-bound telescope he carried under one arm. Or else he'd be aloft, a shapeless dark blotch in the rigging, until he straightened and the telescope would jut out like a thin arm and you'd know he was searching the horizon again.

I understood very well that he was looking for his island. Yet we could be nowhere near it. It was almost surely somewhere in the neighborhood of Vanikoro, in that direction at least, and here was the *White Falcon* sailing slowly before a mild breeze with the coast of Australia barely out of sight astern. I began to understand then that Blakeney's island was his very real passion. Though he might in his colder moments be able to regard it as a philosophy of life, when he found himself in the waters where it reposed, some hot desire took possession of him and would not let him rest. I understood what he had meant when he said that after the island was found he would no more come on deck with the blood in his throat when a man called there was land.

It affected him like, this island. Kept the blood in his throat. It kept him at the very pitch of living. He talked of it, dreamed of it, lived for it alone, and yet the Anglo-Saxon half of him persisted that it was a mirage, an ambition not to be attained. Oh, it's hard to explain. Blakeney was a different man after leaving Torres Strait. His eyes burned, he shook with excitement almost as if with fever. He could scarcely be torn away from the deck to eat.

By George, though, it must have been glorious to live like that, to be keyed up always. He was a little mad, of course. And his madness, the tension he created, affected us all. Even the impassive old mate. And I was as interested in searching the horizon as Blakeney himself. Oh, it ran around, that island desire, like a quick disease. And yet the mate told me once that he'd sailed with Blakeney for ten years and always he had acted the same when he entered the Pacific in any spot near where his island might be. The desire for it never died, you see; never wearied with satiation. I suppose being a trader and having ship's expenses always going on, Blakeney couldn't stick around long enough to get bored with the whole thing. He had to keep moving, to go wherever cargoes took him.

He made the most of his opportunities, though. He managed to get this cargo for Noumea and he laid out the courses from the Torres Strait so we would pass through tracts of sea that the charts claimed were without the slightest land. Yes, we sailed double the distance we need have traveled to reach Noumea. And it was fun, it was great fun even to think that you were plowing through water off the usual track of ships. But we never sighted Blakeney's land. We did raise one tuft of palms one morning, and it happened that Blakeney was eating below when a seaman reported it. He came tearing on deck, literally bubbling with excitement, boiled egg congealing on his beard, crumbs all over his pants, the fat telescope gripped as if it were a club. But the tuft of palms was only a sort of half-born atoll, uncharted, it was true, and we passed it to windward, duly noting its position, approximate height and size and naming it, after the habit of discoverers, White Falcon Reef.

We reached Noumea safely enough and without any untoward happening. As soon as we'd lifted the coast of New Caledonia, Blakeney was changed again. Back surged the Anglo-Saxon half, dominant and in control. His intense excitement vanished. It was patently impossible for the island to be where we were now. His eye resumed its normal humorous fire. He began to sleep and eat with regularity, and no longer carried his fat telescope on deck. He beamed around. He was really like a man who had enjoyed himself immensely. You would never have thought he had lived at the very pitch of desire for nearly two weeks. He was the philosopher again.

He would bellow, laughingly:

"When I have made enough money I will buy a small craft, smaller than the *White Falcon.* And I will trade only among the Santa Cruz and the Hebrides, looking always for the Island of France. Some day I shall find it. It's somewhere out there in the big Pacific. Those old men of La Pérouse found it. Pierre Lafitte found it. I shall find it. Gold and jewels and pearls. Think of that!"

But he didn't care for the jewels and the gold. I knew that. He knew that. It was the search that had him, the delight in the battle as he once had said. The struggle was the thing, and if he ever won, the prize life would be an empty matter for him.

I found in Noumea, as I found in Batavia, that men laughed at Blakeney. He was apparently notorious in the south. They called him "My Island" Blakeney and every acquaintance he would meet would slap him on the back, ask him if he'd found his island and then chuckle. And Blakeney took it all in good nature. He would shout with laughter, order drinks and describe the courses he had taken from Torres Strait in the hope of sighting it, drawing charts on the table top with a thick forefinger in the lees of old liquor. And his listeners would laugh, too, and wink at each other and clap him on the back again—I thought with affection. He was a lovable man.

We got a cargo at Noumea to take to Port Denison. It was almost a straight run over to the Australian Coast and we made it in good time. From Port Denison, Blakeney announced that he was going to load with trade goods and sail north through the Hebrides and Santa Cruz Islands. He claimed he'd heard from a brother skipper that no trading vessel had passed there for several months and the chances were good to pick up business.

"You see," he told me, as I was his supercargo, "we can go on and touch at the Solomons and work toward Singapore. We're sure to get a cargo there even if we have no luck in the Islands."

But he couldn't fool any of us. We knew

the trading was an excuse. He wanted to look for his island again.

We left Port Denison and started north and east to skirt New Caledonia and trade up through the Hebrides. We were among that group of islands for nearly a month, with fair trading success, and then we started for the Santa Cruz group, an act which Blakeney had been anxious to perform ever since we left Australia. From then on he was excited and nervous again, carrying around his fat telescope and searching the horizon continually, making strange courses that were off the beaten track, and indulging in all the other queer things he'd done when we first came through the Torres Strait.

Perhaps you know the story of La Pérouse. It's one of the great pages of Pacific history. No, I wasn't very familiar with it until I met Blakeney. But I looked it up when I got aboard the *White Falcon*. There was a set of encyclopedia in the main cabin. This La Pérouse, Jean François Galaup De La Pérouse was his full name, sailed from France in 1785 with two of the best frigates in the navy, named the *Boussle* and the *Astrolabe*. It was a purely scientific expedition, sent out by Louis XVI, and it seemed to have bad luck from the beginning. You can find it in all the histories. La Pérouse called at Madeira and Teneriffe and rounded Cape Horn without anything of consequence befalling him. Then he pottered through the Islands, landing at some, exploring, making notes. He went as far north as Mount St. Elia, in Alaska. The old boy lost two boatloads of men in the surf thereabouts owing to some fool officer getting reckless.

Then the expedition made a survey of the west coast of America, working south until it reached California, when it turned west and explored the Asiatic waters. Then, in September, 1786, Vicomte de Lesseps was landed at Kamchatka with the expedition's notes and reports to date, to deliver in France. That is the reason histories know so much of what happened up to this time.

When winter came on, La Pérouse went south to Samoa, where a watering party was cut off by the natives and several men were killed.

From Samoa the expedition went to Australia, Botany Bay, where the British already had a settlement. La Pérouse stayed about a month and then left, after giving dispatches to the British commander for forwarding to France. The dispatches said that the expedition was going to the Friendly Islands, New Caledonia, Mendana's Island of Santa Cruz and other parts. That's about all. The old boy sailed and was never heard of again, at least not for a mighty long time. France had a dust-up she called a revolution; La Pérouse was about forgotten until three years after the dispatches had been delivered. Then a relief expedition went out to find the missing frigates. They had no luck at all.

Then in 1812, so the histories say, a man named Dillon was mate of the sandalwood trader *Hunter* bound for New South Wales and the Fiji Islands. In the Fiji's the ship was attacked by natives and lost a lot of men. Dillon and his servant named Bushart got away with a few others and some time after Dillon landed Bushart, at his own request, on an island named Tucopia, in the New Hebrides.

Fourteen years later Dillon, now a skipper, was sailing from Valparaiso to Bengal, when it occurred to him to run into Tucopia and see how the old shipmate was getting on. Bushart was alive, and Dillon, while at the island, found that a member of his crew had bartered some fish-hooks in exchange for the silver guard of a sword. When Dillon saw the guard he found ciphers on it which he couldn't read, so he asked Bushart about it and Bushart said that Tucopia had a lot of such junk, knives and forks, axes and screws. These things had been traded for from the island of Vanikoro, where, so the legend had it, a great many years before two ships had been wrecked. The tale was that some of the ship's survivors were still alive. Dillon guessed that he was on the track of the lost Pérouse. I suppose every one in the south at that time had heard of the missing explorer.

Dillon wanted to go to Vanikoro to find the survivors but he was short of food and his ship was in a bad condition, and after leaving Tucopia he fell into a flat calm that lasted for over a week. So he decided to go on to Calcutta, and when he got there he told his story. He was immediately outfitted by the Honorable East India Company and sent out to solve the mystery of La Pérouse. It was on this new ship, the *Research*, that Pierre Lafitte sailed, and Pierre was, as you'll remember, maternal grandfather to Captain Blakeney.

Well, they reached Vanikoro all right, though they had a mutiny or two on the way, and they recovered a lot of articles that undoubtedly came from the wrecked ships of the Frenchmen. They even found the wrecks. Then Dillon sailed to some islands not far from Vanikoro to try to learn what had happened to a party of the wreck survivors who the natives said had departed in a longboat. Undoubtedly these had been sent by La Pérouse to seek aid. The boat was never found, was never heard of again. So the histories.

Then, according to the old yarn of the Pacific, the yarn every one laughed at and repeated as a good joke, as men joke of the North Pole or fabled Ophir, Pierre Lafitte, once a sailor under Dillon, managed to get command of a ship of his own and started trading through the Islands. I think he must have been like Blakeney, a real pirate of a man, who had always before him the picture of those jewels and gold that the lost boat was supposed to have carried. Anyway, he searched for them. And Herman, at Mother Plook's, had told me of the almost legendary result. And so, eventually, Blakeney came in, with his dreams and his obsessions, his philosophy and his Latin madness, looking for the lost Island of France, with its jewels and gold, its pearls and its half-caste Frenchmen.

The foregoing is enough to tell you that after the *White Falcon* left the New Hebrides she was in that very particular part of the sea where La Pérouse had sailed, where his longboat had gone to get help. So it was easy to understand why Blakeney was worked up to a greater pitch than ever. He could scarcely be dragged down from the masthead at all.

He told me one day that on previous voyages he'd made for the exact spot of his grandfather's last "sight" and had tried to figure from there just how fast and in what direction a ship would drift. He'd also gone right to the exact spot where Pierre Lafitte had been picked up by Captain Maddison of the whaler *Dunstan Miller* and had tried to figure out how a canoe would have to drift to reach that spot. But it was no use. Nothing he'd ever figured had been right. He could only search and hope and feel strongly somewhere within him that he was going to find that island.

To this day I do not know whether he discovered it. I do not even know whether he saw it, whether I saw it either. This is what actually happened, the facts I am sure of. After leaving the New Hebrides for about two days we had fair southwesterly winds. Then, on the morning of the third day we ran into a hurricane. The sky went black and the water went black too. There was lots of wind and lots of rain. But we had a stout ship under us and I wasn't particularly worried, though there were a few exciting minutes when the foretopmast went by the board and we almost broached to. However, we got her before it again and ran like a crazy thing to the north and east, with not much danger of being pooped because the *White Falcon* was so beautifully built and so fast, even under bare poles.

ALL through the blow Blakeney was very despondent. He puttered about in the main cabin, trying to read, or prowled on deck in his oilskins, frowning and morose. You see it was so thick, there was no earthly use of his going aloft with his telescope. You couldn't see a ship's length overside. And even when the sky lightened and the wind let up a bit, there were rain squalls every other minute that simply blotted the whole world from view.

The hurricane lasted all of twenty-four hours. The morning of the next day it was still blowing dangerously hard and the sea was beginning to really get up and throw us about. We were running with pretty dry decks, except for the spume, and quite safe as long as we hit nothing and remained as we were. The charts gave us clear sea for quite a goodish distance; the glass had begun to rise and there was every prospect that within another twelve hours we'd be able to set a course once more. This exact time I refer to was on the morning of the fourth day after clearing the Hebrides, a day after the hurricane started.

I was on watch. Both the first and second mates had been up since the commencement of the blow and were now under decks and asleep. Most of the seamen were sleeping also, though I had two men standing by under the break of the poop, and of course a man at the wheel. The cook was puttering round in his galley. I was on the poop, walking up and down. Blakeney was standing by the helmsman and glowering into the sheets of rain that hammered on the really huge sea.

I'd been on deck about an hour and a half when Blakeney joined me. He shivered a bit and rumbled in his beard, looking uneasily around.

"I've got a feeling," he started, nodding his head. "Yes, a feeling. We must be somewhere near my island. We're going to find it—now—today." He laughed shakily. Not at all like his old bull's bellow. All the fire, all the life, all the hearty philosophy of the man seemed to have deserted him, leaving him limp and almost fearful! His Latin buoyant half had been submerged and yet the Anglo-Saxon of him had not risen to harden his shell. You understand what I mean? He went on, after we'd taken a turn or two along the poop:

"When we find it, I don't know what I'll do." He looked at me and I saw that his wide gray eyes were frightened, yes, actually frightened. "I don't know what I'll do," he whispered and there was panic in his voice.

It came to me with a shock that he was really and genuinely afraid of finding the Island of France. He had a feeling that he was about to see it, about to find it and he was terrified. I think it was then I understood that he had really meant what he said when he told me that he would die if he achieved his desire. He actually wanted it to remain undiscovered, wanted it to remain a rainbow hovering on the horizon of the might be. It was his dream and he wanted to keep it from being pawed over by the world, wanted it to remain a dream. Good ——, I thought at that moment, the man's crazy.

I really thought he was. He looked it. If you had known him in his normal condition, upright, square, with his fan-shaped beard, twinkling wide eyes and all the hearty life of him flowing out to envelop you, you'd understand. You'd have thought the same yourself if you'd seen him as he was then, limp, whispering, dull-eyed, shivering, actually terrified that he was about to see his dream come true. A queer matter. You bet it was. And a queer man, I say. And yet, how many of us would really want our dream to come true? What else would there be to life if it did?

Our greatest desires, our deepest dreams are immense illusions. In our secret hearts we know it but yet we cherish them, work for their fulfilment, and that fulfilment, fortunately, we seldom see. There it is. It's foolishness, it's madness, but it's life.

Blakeney left me to go and lean on the rail, where the spume streamed his face with water and the wind tried to blow his breath back into his lungs. The very hunch of his back shouted dejection. I went on walking up and down the staggering poop, thinking the whole thing over.

Then, all of a sudden, I heard a sharp exclamation followed by a stifled cry. I turned and stared. Blakeney was upright and rigid. He was pointing away into the horizon to starboard, and stepping close to him I noticed his face was working.

"Oh, God!" he muttered despairingly. "Oh, God!"

I looked along the line of his arm and thought I could see something. I wasn't sure. To this day I am not sure. A furious rain squall had just boiled by, leaving a little period of temporary calm, though the spume clouded the vision. Another rain squall boiled immediately on the heels of the first. I imagine the time between the two, the period of calm, was perhaps ten seconds, perhaps a little more. And I thought I saw, peering over the sheets of spume, up above the misty horizon, two hills with a valley between, just exactly as if you looked at a saddle from one side. I say I thought. The next moment the second rain squall blotted everything from view and you could see nothing at all.

But Blakeney was still pointing, his face still working. And he was still muttering, in despair—

"Oh, God! Oh, God!"

I can tell you I felt pretty shaky. I said, "Why, I thought I saw—" And he turned on me furiously, suddenly all life and rage, his wet beard bristling and his great hands shaking me by the shoulders.

"There!" he choked. "There, you saw it!"

But I couldn't say I had. I wasn't sure at all. It had all happened so quickly. I was inclined, even in those quick, jerky seconds that had elapsed since Blakeney's exclamation brought me round, to believe that I had seen a saddle-shaped blur against the mist only because I had been looking for it. You see, I was keyed up about this island stuff. It had always been described to me as a saddle-shaped affair, two hills with a valley between. I'd seen Blakeney looking for it day after day, week after week. I'd heard so much about it, morning, noon and night, I was actually, toward the last, looking for a saddle-shaped island myself. And when Blakeney had called and pointed, it had come to me in a flash, automatically, that he'd found what he sought.

"You saw it!" bellowed Blakeney again and without waiting for my answer flung me aside and ran to the wheel. The helmsman had been gaping at us as if we were both mad. I don't believe he even looked where Blakeney pointed. The captain ran up to him, knocked him aside and took the spokes of the wheel. I moved then. I ran, too. It came to me in a flash what he intended. He was going back, going to turn the ship and head for that vague blur he thought he'd seen on the rim of the world. And to turn in that weather, to come broadside on in that sea and wind meant disaster.

I tugged at his arms, shouting, but they were like bars of iron. His face was set, blazing as with some inward fire, and yet his eyes were wide gray pools of sheer terror. He was being driven by a force beyond his control. He did not speak, only made inarticulate noises in his beard. I screamed at him.

Relentlessly he turned the wheel. The helmsman jumped to aid me, frightened for his life, and I called to the seamen standing by under the break of the poop. I doubt whether they heard me in the noise and the wind, but some sixth sense must have warned them something was wrong, for they came running. Between us we tore Blakeney loose and righted the ship. She was already taking small crests over midships and staggering mightily in her gait. Blakeney had slipped to the scuppers, and when he rose his face was a grim mask. He glared at us and I advanced toward him, hands outstretched, to try and soothe him.

And then before I could stop him he'd ripped off his oilskins, torn off his jacket and was overside. Yes. Just like that. There was not even time for me to rush to him across the slippery poop. *Rip-rip-rip*—went his buttons, and they bounced on the planking. *Rip-rip-rip*—and he was stripped to shirt and pants. Then overside; a spring, a hand on the rail and a splash that the wind whipped into foam. I ran to the side, yelling, picking up a life-buoy and hurling it at his bobbing head with the fan-shaped beard whipped out before it. He caught the life-buoy. I saw that much. He thrust one arm through it and began swimming with the other. He did not look back, made no sound that we could hear. He simply started swimming to starboard, toward the vague blur we'd seen in that direction.

We had not gone far beyond it, if we'd passed it at all. You must understand that everything happened in the space of scarcely more than a minute. First, Blakeney leaving me to lean on the rail. Then his exclamation, his gripping of my shoulders, his rush to the wheel, his defeat, his leap overside and his catching the life-buoy. All in a little over a minute. It was stupendous. I didn't know what to do. There was no possible hope of picking him up in that sea. We were storm-driven as it was, driven for our very lives and the safety of the ship. We couldn't stop, didn't dare to stop or heave to. We could only stand at the rail, two seamen and myself, and stare stupidly at that dark spot of a head rising and falling over the swells into the sheets of rain that cascaded down from the thick white sky. Then the head was gone, and we saw it no more, gone into the spume and the swells and still heading to starboard, away in the direction of that blur.

Now what can I say? What is there to say? Blakeney had searched for his island so long, believed in it so deeply, ordered all his life by a faith that it existed so that some day he must find it. And though, perhaps, when he thought of it coolly and in the light of his genial philosophy he wished he'd never find it, yet, at the last, when it came to him, or he thought it came, between two rain squalls, it had overwhelmed him. And there it is. I deny that he was wholly mad. He may or may not have reached his island. He was a strong man and the hurricane was abating. He had a life-buoy to sustain him. And the island may or may not have been there. To this day I would not swear to it. No, he was not wholly mad.

If Blakeney was mad, then we are all a little mad. We all start out in life with some queer desire or ambition that we are willing to fight for, starve for, work for and sometimes die for. It may be a woman, or a farm, or a ship or an island. And it doesn't matter much in the end, so long as it's something, something to stir you, something to lift the blood to your throat, something to have shining like a rainbow on the horizon of life, something that when you think of it will drive the cynicism from your eyes and keep the lamp of youth burning in your heart.

A MANIFEST DESTINY

CONCLUSION — by Arthur D. Howden Smith

Author of "Porto Bello Gold," "Swain's Folly," etc.

The first part of story briefly retold in story form

IN THE early 'fifties San Francisco seemed civilization's ultimate camping-ground. People the world over were flocking to the city of gold. Transportation was difficult in those days; the overland route was dangerous. The railroad across Panama was tedious and expensive. Most people preferred the canal and railway transit through Nicaragua.

The firm of Morgan and Garrison had wrested control of the Nicaragua transit from Commodore Vanderbilt, and Colonel William Walker, the famous Sonora filibuster, was about the town talking of the "manifest destiny" of the United States to annex Central American territory.

To this town came young Peter Corlaer Ormerod of the New York law firm of Ormerod and Van Ruysdyck, attorneys to the Commodore. He bore a warning and ultimatum from his client to Garrison.

He walked up to a cabby who was busily reading "Pickwick Papers."

"Take me to a good hotel," he said, "but first stop by at the office of Garrison."

"Aha, Ormerod," said the cabby, and, looking up, Ormerod recognized Fletcher Cabot, whom he had known at Harvard.

Fletcher drove Ormerod to Garrison's and was told to wait. The cabby called on Colonel Walker, advising him that Ormerod was at Garrison's, whither Walker immediately went. The filibuster arrived in the midst of a discussion between Ormerod and Garrison about the situation in Nicaragua. To Ormerod, it seemed from his discussion of the matter that Walker knew the history and situation there from beginning to end.

Walker took Ormerod to Duval's where he lived.

There he introduced him to three of his aids: Tom Jenkins, the Viscount de Morbecque and Captain von Ritterstein. Later Walker expelled two spies of the Nicaragua Legitimist Party from the bar at Duval's. These were an American and an Englishman, Spencer and Webster.

Walker and Ormerod went to dinner where they met Don Jaime and Señorita de Avila, exiles from Nicaragua, nobles of the democrat party, which Walker favored. Ormerod learned that Walker was preparing for a filibustering campaign in Nicaragua to colonize the state and reestablish the democratic party. Walker offered Ormerod a place on his staff.

"I can not accept until I have completed my business for the Commodore," said the lawyer, "but after that I shall consider it."

That night Ormerod heard cries in the street, as if of some one attacked. Rushing to the vicinity of the shouting, he discovered that Spencer and Webster were attacking Don Jaime and the señorita. Before he could drive them off they managed to wound him in the shoulder, and to knock Don Jaime senseless.

They carried Don Jaime to his rooms and sent for Walker, who treated his wounds. Along with his other accomplishments, Walker was no mean physician.

Shortly afterward Ormerod set Eastward by the Overland route.

"Will you write to me?" he asked the señorita before he left.

"Yes, my friend," she answered.

ON HIS way to New York he decided definitely that when he had closed his business with the Commodore he would join the force in Nicaragua. His resolution was strengthened when he arrived at home by a letter from the señorita.

"Cabot said that you should be one of us," it read, "I told him that *you* were."

Ormerod called on Vanderbilt to report, and tell him his resolution. He saw Spencer leaving the office.

"The man is a crook and a cheap murderer," he told the Commodore.

"He serves my purposes," answered Vanderbilt. "I am sending him to Nicaragua as a spy."

"I am going to Nicaragua, too," answered Ormerod, "but for a different reason." And he told the Commodore his plans.

Vanderbilt was pleased that the old adventurous blood of the Ormerods had come out in Peter. He believed it to show that the boy had some worth. Not so his partner Dick Van Ruysdyck and Dick's daughter Lydia. They were heart-broken, though Lydia, who was Ormerod's fiancée, did not show it.

At dinner that night at Lydia's there was much discussion of Walker's recent defeat at Rivas by the Legitimists. Ormerod met two Englishmen, one, Salmon, who sneered at Walker's enterprise, and for that matter, at every one and everything. The other was Henningsen, a soldier of fortune, who was anxious to join Walker.

After saying good-by to Lydia and his old house servant Nora, Ormerod set out for the pier to take passage south.

As he walked toward the dock a fireman came running after him calling:

"Misther Ormerod. Misther Ormerod. I hear ye're going ta Nicaragua. Take us with ye."

"I can't, Mike," said Ormerod. "But when I get there and find out how things are, I'll let you know, and you can come down."

"That's what meself will do then," Mike called after him. "Hurroo and hurray. Here's to war."

IT WAS a wet morning when Ormerod arrived at Greytown, Nicaragua. Greytown was the western port of the Tranist Company and under the control of the British and the Legitimist party. As Ormerod got off the liner he encountered Jenkins and Cabot who were investigating the enemy port. They boarded another boat for the river route across country. At a stopping-off place Ormerod saved Cabot and Jenkins from being shot by a company of Legitimists under Spencer by pretending to be on the Commodore's business.

When they arrived at Virgin Bay they found horses ready to take them to Walker's headquarters at San Juan Del Sur.

Valle, a native colonel of lancers, rode up to them.

"Ah, Don Tomas," he said, "who ees zis?"

Jenkins told him.

"Welcome, Don Pedro," shouted the old man. "I am Valle, *coronel* of lancers. Zose who lofe me call me Chelon." He embraced Ormerod. "When I steek zem weet' my lance, zey go *pouf!* An' I am always ready for ze fon or ze spree."

They mounted their horses and rode to the filibuster camp. Ormerod saw Walker, and told him of recruiting possibilities in the East, and was made a captain on Walker's staff. As he came from the interview and into the headquarters bar he found Tom Jenkins very drunk. Jenkins tried to bully him, but he pinned the Westerner's arms.

"Are you my friend or not, Tom?" he asked.

"If ye don't stand between me'n my likker, y'are," said Jenkins.

"Your liquor has nothing to do with it. If you're my friend you'll come and eat dinner with me. How about it?"

Jenkins went.

"How did you make out with the colonel?" asked Cabot.

"Pretty well. He took me on the staff. Captain."

Cabot lifted his glass.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "I give you Captain Ormerod of the staff."

They drank, bottoms up.

A WEEK later Walker informed Ormerod that they should advance on Granada, chief city of Nicaragua, immediately. He introduced him to Don Rafael Canedo, a cousin of the de Avilas and a democratic leader. Ormerod thought he detected a note of hostility in the Nicaraguan's manner.

After a forced march they attacked Granada. The move was totally unexpected by the Legitimists, and they captured the city without much loss. Walker ordered that there should be no looting. Cabot and Jenkins captured Webster, but Walker released and deported him on Ormerod's advice, lest the enmity of the spy's British countrymen be incurred.

IN REPRISAL the Legitimists immediately attacked Leon; whereat Walker shot one of their chief men. The frightened Legitimists sent their general, Corral, to sue for terms. A peace was declared. A conservative and mild Legitimist, Don Patricio Rivas was made president of the new republic, Corral was secretary of war—but the post of commander-in-chief, Walker reserved for himself.

Don Jaime, the señorita and Rafael Canedo, came from Leon with news that Corral was plotting with the Leonese against the existing Government.

"Teach a tiger to tend cattle, and teach a *blanco* to keep faith," said Canedo.

Walker had Corral tried by a military court and shot.

Ormerod went to dinner with Don Jaime and the señorita at the Casa de Avila. Afterward, walking in the garden with the señorita, he embraced her.

"No, no, Peter," she cried, "now is no time for love-making. How ever we may feel toward each other, it is Nicaragua to whom we have dedicated ourselves."

Walker sent Ormerod back to New York on a recruiting expedition. He had nearly persuaded the Commodore to throw his money and influence with Walker when he received a letter from his commander saying that he had already made an arrangement with Morgan and Garrison. The letter also enclosed Ormerod's commisson as colonel.

Vanderbilt was furious, and Ormerod felt that this letter sounded the knell of the filibuster's cause. However, he continued his recruiting, made a trip to Washington, where he discovered the administration friendly to Walker, and managed to transport troops to Nicaragua in spite of the Commodore's withdrawal of his steamships.

Then he returned, himself, as Costa Rica had declared war on Walker.

He found the general ready to march on the Costa Ricans. Don Rafael showed signs of annoyance and anger at the Americans.

He met the señorita.

"I feared you would not come back," she said.

"But I had to come back—to you," he answered.

"Oh, Peter," she cried, "I shall tell my beads for you, day and night. If only we did not have Nicaragua to consider—"

TWO days later Walker executed a forced march on Rivas. Failing to carry the town by a surprize attack, they managed to gain a foothold in the Plaza after enormous loss of men. De Morbecque was wounded fatally in the throat, Cabot through the spine. The Costa Ricans received reinforcements and Walker realized that he would be forced to retire. Cabot, de Morbecque and several others were wounded too seriously to be moved, and had to remain behind while the army retreated. They were killed next morning by the bayonets of the advancing Costa Ricans.

At Granada Ormerod received messages from the de Avilas in Leon warning him that Webster the Englishman was plotting with the government officials there. But when Walker went to Leon he was welcomed with loud cheers by the citizens. Canedo stood on the street watching the triumphal entry. He shouted at Ormerod—

"So Imperial Cæsar has brought the prætorians with him, eh!"

"You won't talk that way when the Guatamalans and San Salvadorians are marching across the border," said the colonel.

"That depends on whether they come as enemies or allies," snapped Don Rafael.

Ormerod rode away, perturbed.

His perturbation was not ungrounded. Three days later the Leonese revolted and the democratic government, including Canedo, deserted to the Legitimists. The de Avilas were the only Nicaraguans of any prominence who remained loyal to Walker.

Walker appointed Don Jaime provisional president of the republic, and held an election at which he was chosen the nation's chief executive. Ormerod received a letter from Henningsen telling him that he intended to join with Walker.

Then all the other Central American states joined the Legitimists and made war on Walker. Henningsen arrived with some howitzers, and the United States broke off diplomatic relations with the Walker government. Walker found that the Costa Ricans had gained control of the Transit and that he would have to abandon Granada to regain it. And, in order that the enemy should not be able to use Granada as a stronghold against him, he found it necessary to destroy the city. Henningsen and Ormerod were left in charge of the destruction. During it, when most of the Americans were drunk and the townspeople were in revolt, Canedo attacked the city. Von Ritterstein was killed.

IX

VON RITTERSTEIN'S death was not in vain; his charge paralyzed the initiative of the allies, and afforded Henningsen a chance to reorganize the position in the Plaza during the night of the 24th. By every rule of tactics, this position was a hopeless one. The Americans were surrounded; their reserve ammunition and food supply were limited; they had left two hundred and twenty-seven men capable of bearing arms, who were encumbered with seventy-three wounded, besides seventy women, children and sick. Twenty-three men had been killed or captured—the same thing—in resisting the allied attacks, and twenty-seven more were cut off in the ruins of an old fort by the wharf, where they maintained themselves independently for two days—without, however, any effect upon the major struggle. And to cap Henningsen's difficulties, his men still had access to considerable quantities of liquor, and while willing to fight, rebelled at such tedious work as the erection of barricades.

But Henningsen refused to be discouraged. He continued that night the work of demolishing the buildings around the Plaza, with the consequence that morning saw a wall of fire barring the filibusters from the principal body of their foes; and he established his citadel in the Parochial, the buildings adjacent to it on the Plaza and the houses on either side of the street running toward the lake. His one purpose from now on was to fight his way to the lakeshore, and he stuck to this purpose, regardless of odds and the indiscipline of his men. It was a contest between one man's will, coordinate and indomitable, aided by several faithful officers and a couple of hundred drunken freebooters, and an enemy outnumbering them more than ten to one, but deficient in that feral vigor which is the essential element of success.

The first day they recovered Esquipulus; the Guadalupe resisted them for three days, but finally Ormerod stormed its portals, with Mike Gilligan and sixty Riflemen at his back. Two long strides toward the lake! Meantime beating off assaults from every quarter, not one or two, but a dozen and twenty. Hour after hour, day and night, the waves of monkey-faces lapped against the barricades. You killed them, and they brought in new levies from the north—a sowing of the dragons' teeth. And within the barricades sprang up another enemy, more potent than the allies, more destructive than the demon of drink—disease. Insanitary, crowded quarters, heaps of unburied dead, bad water and a diet of mule-meat bred cholera and typhus.

Henningsen tried to combat this menace by shifting his sick and wounded from the Parochial to the recaptured Guadalupe. He had no further use for the Plaza; except the Parochial and the guardhouse on the corner of the street opposite the lake, the structures surrounding it were smoldering ruins. So he mined the two surviving buildings, withdrew his Riflemen from the Parochial's towers and fired the trains in time to topple tons of brick and stone upon the allied troops who thronged the Plaza, intending to harass his retirement.

This move had the double effect of shortening his lines of defense and facilitating the prosecution of an advance toward the lake; but it was fruitless in checking disease. Conditions in the Guadalupe became more aggravated than they had been in the Parochial, as the number of sick and wounded increased. The place was a bedlam. Delirious with fever, patients crawled about the floor, mauling each other, howling for water or for brandy, falling over the wounded, who screamed with pain, resisting the attentions of their nurses. Contagion was almost unavoidable, and Ormerod was scarcely surprized one evening, when he made his round of inspection, to find the señorita sitting beside a pallet on the floor of the sacristy which supported the frail body of her father.

"It is typhus," she said listlessly.

"Has the doctor—"

"Yes, but what can he do?"

"Drugs?"

"Peter, this air is death to the weak!"

"Oh, not death."

"Death," she repeated.

Ormerod looked down at the pallid, cameo-like face, twisting on the coat that did for pillow. The bloodless lips muttered ceaselessly, and stooping lower, Ormerod caught their refrain:

"We teach zhem zhe ballot-box. *Sí, sí, mi general*, zhat ees zhe cure for zhem."

An expression of affectionate derision crossed his daughter's features.

"You hear?" she whispered gently. "We are incorrigible, we idealists!"

"I'm sorry," floundered Ormerod. "Surely, we can—"

"No, it's better so. He has nothing to live for. He is like the Casa; he has served his purpose."

"You are not sorry?" he asked, amazed.

"Why should I be?" she answered tranquilly. "What is death but another experience? The most wonderful of all—since it is the last."

Her eyes met his with a wisdom which made him uncomfortable, and on his brow he felt the cool impact of those strange vital forces which flooded before the whirring pinions of her spirit.

She touched the signet-ring on her father's shrunken finger.

"*Si Dios quiere*," she quoted the motto.

Don Jaime roused uneasily.

"Zhe ballot-box," he fretted. "We mus' not be disappoint'. Give it time, señors—a cure for rrrevolution, for—"

Ormerod bent and kissed her hand.

"I will come, if you need me," he promised.

De Avila died in the early morning, in that hour when the life-current is at the ebb, as the allied guns commenced a bombardment which was prelude to the most desperate attack of the siege. In a situation so prolific of death, his passing was almost unnoticed. Even the señorita went straight from his bedside to receive the latest wounded from the barricades, and Ormerod was summoned to command the defense of the churchyard wall in rear of the Guadalupe.

All through the forenoon the tide of battle rolled across the smoking ruins of the city, bayonet-crested waves that shattered upon the hot rifle-muzzles of little groups of Americans, gathered by tens and twenties wherever the danger was greatest; and over the steady rattle of musketry and the booming of cannon shrilled the yelps of the assaulting battalions:

"*Mueran a los Yanquis! Sangre! Sangre!*"

If once those bayonets secured a lodgement inside the barricades the siege was ended; the odds would be more than twenty to one, and at close, rough-and-tumble fighting twenty monkey-faces could account for one Rifleman, whose only edged weapon was the bowie-knife. So at all costs the barricades must be maintained, and the Americans loaded and fired, loaded and fired, until their shoulders ached and their hands trembled; and the little squad of artillerymen raced the light six-pounders from one threatened point to another, their faces black with sweat and gunpowder, their voices croaking jocular admonitions:

"Hyah, thar, yew Riflemen, leave Betsy Ann speak her piece!" "Run yer hoses, Redshirts! Number Two's on the line."

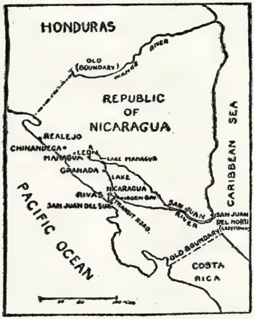
At noon there came a lull, and the defenders gratefully seized the opportunity to squat under cover and gobble a stingy ration of mule-meat, washed down with very watery coffee. Ormerod took two men and returned to the Guadalupe to bury de Avila. The señorita was waiting for him, kneeling by her father's shrouded corpse, a rosary clicking through her fingers. She rose as the Riflemen clumped awkwardly in, and received them as graciously as if her sacristy were her parlor.

"You are very kind to me in my trouble."

"Aw, that's all right, lady."

"We'uns is right sorry for yo', miss."

They made to pick up the body, but Ormerod stepped in front of them and lifted it lightly in his powerful arms.



"Where?" he asked simply.

She pointed to the steep flight of stone stairs in one corner.

"The crypt. You must pry up a stone."

One of the Riflemen fetched a candle, the other found a crowbar, and the procession descended into the bowels of the church. A stamp of the foot identified the location of a vault, and the Riflemen readily levered up the covering slab.

"Let me have the candle," she said. "See! There is plenty of room."

A moldering coffin showed in the wan light some three or four feet beneath them, and on to it they lowered the inert bundle that had been de Avila.

"Shall we—" Ormerod hesitated.

"I have prayed," she answered calmly. "That is all."

A sudden roar of artillery shook the foundations of the Guadalupe, was repeated.

"——!" exclaimed a Rifleman. "Eighteen-pounders."

"Right close," said his mate.

Shouts echoed down the stairs from the sacristy.

"Cunnul! Cunnul Ormerod! They's a masked battery poundin' the churchyard wall. They're a-breachin' it."

Ormerod turned to the señorita.

"You'll have to excuse us—Finish this later—That wall's insecure—"

"Yes, yes," she agreed, undisturbed. "You must go at once, Peter." And to the Riflemen, "Thank you, my friends. I shall pray to the Virgin to watch over you."

They bolted after Omerod, ducking their heads, with hoarse acknowledgments!

"Thank'e, lady."

"Sho' am obleeged, miss."

Upstairs the bellow of Henningsen's commands reverberated under the arches of the nave.

"All out! Every man who can stand! Up with you, men, sick or wounded! The churchyard wall is down! Ormerod! You take charge while I go for help. You must hold on. Hold on! Hear me? That wall must be held."

"Yes, sir," Ormerod answered mechanically. But if the wall was down how could it be held? He knew that wall. Upon it converged a tangle of alleys and mean streets, now a wilderness of roofless huts and half-burned plantain thickets, excellent protection for the enemy against the deadly accuracy of the American rifles. A breach? That meant bayonets in their midst, a wild rush of brown men, numbers vanquishing efficiency.

Boom, boom! went the eighteen-pounders, and the roar of their brazen throats was succeeded by the crash of falling masonry. The racket of small-arms united in one tearing crackle of sound, pierced by the thin screech of Latin voices:

"Mueran a los Yanquis! Sangre! Sangre!"

"No time to lose," Ormerod muttered to himself, running from the church. "They're ready to charge. Must have worked forward those guns while they kept us busy this morning."

The churchyard was blanketed with gray cannon-smoke, but he could see the shelving pile of riven bricks that had been the middle section of the wall. Atop of it lay a handful of Riflemen, firing down into the plantain thickets; past him tottered a file of skeletons, propping themselves along on the butts of their rifles, the invalids who had responded to their general's exhortation. The meagreness of his resources frightened him. Eighteen whole men to make good a barrier of débris six feet high! Where were the guns? If he had only a howitzer—or a pair of six-pounders!

Drums rattled in the plantain thickets, and a Rifleman in the breach rolled over on his elbow, caught sight of Ormerod and yelled:

"Dear ——! Here's all the greasers this side o' ——, Colonel."

Ormerod swallowed hard.

"Let 'em come," he answered. "We'll hold them. Butts and knives, men!"

He whipped out his sword and leaped up the slope of brick and rubble, straddling the top to survey the enemy's dispositions. And the spectacle demanded his admiration. There was the real dignity of war in that compact column of bayonets, with the drummers beating the charge and the officers striding ahead. Who was the man leading, a general by his gold lace? It was Canedo! Plucky, by George! The fellow was not going to chance the attack's being spoiled. Too bad to kill him. Still, war was war.

Ormerod pointed his sword.

"That's Canedo, men, their commander-in-chief. A double-eagle to the one brings him down."

A dozen Riflemen drew beads on Canedo's glittering torso, but their shots left him unharmed. An epaulette was torn off, his képi went spinning, but he pressed on, his men cheering frantically, heedless of the casualties in their ranks. Ormerod, himself, leveled his Colt and snapped it as the head of the assaulting column neared the breach; an officer at the Nicaraguan's elbow received the bullet. Canedo recognized the New Yorker, and shouted some taunt in Spanish, which produced a jar of laughter in the allied ranks; then, in English:

"My day, Ormerod! Surrender!"

A burst of passion, almost insane in its tensity, wrenched Ormerod.

"I'll see you ——!" he shouted. "Come on up, you cur! We'll treat you like the traitor you are."

Canedo's face was contorted with fury.

"Mueran a los Yanquis!" he screamed.

And the column shrieked its answer:

"Sangre! Sangre!"

A knot of officers and sergeants, the van of the assault, struggled up the outer slope of the breach after Canedo, and Ormerod crossed swords with him, but almost at once the following torrent of allies surged between them, and Ormerod was carried away on its crest, hacking and thrusting with the energy of despair, his revolver spitting as fast as he could recock the heavy hammer. When it was empty he dashed it into a man's face to protect himself from an unexpected bayonet-thrust. Bayonets everywhere! They poured over the breach in a bright torrent of steel.

Back, back, drifted the defense. The breach was cleared to its inner slope—back, back, always back. Ormerod pulled himself free for a moment; his clothes were rent to shreds, and he was bleeding from three or four superficial wounds.

"All in it, Riflemen," he shouted. "Better die here than before the firing-squads."

The Riflemen growled a response, and sprang to support him. Up the slope of the breach they drove, swinging their weapons like maces, tall, stalwart men, bearing down their foes by sheer grit and muscle. But weight of numbers was opposed to them; they tired, slowed, inevitably receded. Canedo was alive to the opportunity; he rallied his men, and the bayonets streamed after him. Over the breach and into the churchyard. Ormerod gritted his teeth. This must be the end. The wall was lost. Well, at least, he could take Canedo with him.

He hurled himself at the allies, his giant bulk cowing many of the little men who happened in his path. The Riflemen followed him—always ready to follow a man who dared odds, those reckless, drunken wastrels. And to his joy he faced Canedo a second time. Their swords clashed with the clean, singing tinkle of steel. Ormerod was the stronger, Canedo the more skilled. A brave fight, a duel worth watching. But the monkey-faces were not disposed to stand by and see their general skewered, nor were the dwindling Riflemen content to leave Ormerod to be surrounded.

A prodding of bayonets, a clatter of clubbed rifles—and Ormerod was on the ground, Canedo's sword darting for his heart. Confusion past description, now. Every man's hand for himself. Every man's eyes on the enemy nearest him. Nobody saw the lithe figure that sped through the writhing smoke. How long had she hovered on the conflict's rim? Nobody could say. All men ever knew was that the señorita cast herself upon Ormerod as Canedo delivered his thrust. A killing thrust, deep, deep, into her breast.

Canedo's nerveless hand relinquished the hilt.

"*Jesu!*" he gasped.

Ormerod staggered to his feet, clasping the señorita in his arms. She groaned as the released hilt dragged on the point that was buried in her vitals, and he plucked it forth. Only a trickle of crimson on the steel! He heard a voice—was it his?—saying dully:

"You've killed her."

Canedo tossed up his hands in a gesture of futile protest, turned and fled across the breach, shoving his own men right and left to make a passage of escape. The monkey-faces lowered their bayonets in surprize. Something was wrong. What—

From the churchyard came a brisk clamor of strident voices:

"Out o' the way, Riflemen! Ole Marm Howitzer's agonner belch."

Ormerod knelt instinctively to escape the blast of canister. The señorita's lips were fluttering. He brought his ear against them.

"Life must pay for life," she whispered. "It is good—to have loved—Peter."

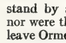
Her eyes smiled at him. All love in that smile, love of maid, love of wife, love of mother.

"I am glad," continued the breathless voice. "Now nothing can—come—between us."

"Don't go," he pleaded. "Stay with me."

Her eyes brightened, and for the last time he experienced that weird sensation as of a mighty wind blowing upon his face. No, no! Then, abruptly, he realized that he was alone.

X



ORMERODcarried the señorita back to the crypt of the Guadalupe and laid her beside Don Jaime, uncoffined like him, a blanket for a shroud, no flowers, not even a priest to patter prayers over her. And that was the last of the de Avilas. With fire and sword old Gil Gonzalez had come into Nicaragua, and by fire and sword his seed had perished. A complete cycle of destiny, if such a thing there be.

But this philosophy was not for Ormerod, who went about his duties in a blind daze, mechanically acknowledging the softly spoken words of commiseration from Henningsen, Mike Gilligan's perfervid grief—"Ah, the poor lass! But shure, the angels have their arrms around her this minit"—the blunt sorrow of rough men.

For that day marked the turning-point in the siege. The men developed cheerfulness where they had been sullen. They worked with a will on the strengthening of the defenses. To Henningsen's amazement, they completed the restoration of the churchyard wall in the night. There was less grumbling over rations, less malingering on duty. Best of all, practically no drunkenness. They were as arrogant as their officers the following afternoon when the sentries reported a flag of truce approaching from the ruined Plaza.

"Aw, the greasers wanter surrender!" "Wa'al, they cain't have none o' my mule-meat." "Hooray, we'll give 'em all to Uncle Billy to dig the canal with, huh?"

Ormerod, who accompanied Henningsen to receive the flag, was stirred from his lethargy when he recognized the bearer as Webster. The Hon. Billy scrambled over a barricade in the midst of a shower of adobe-bricks, his eyes eagerly scrutinizing the condition of the besieged, so far as it was visible to him.

"You seem to be jolly well shot up," he commented. "Quite a mess, what? Must be awfully short of grub."

He wrinkled his nose.

"Disgustin' smell, that."

"It's dead allies," Henningsen told him drily. "There are some hundreds scattered around."

Webster regarded him with interest.

"You're Henningsen—"

"*General* Henningsen, sir."

"Oh, anything you please," Webster conceded. "The point is: General Canedo sent me to summon you to surrender. He'll give you terms, too—guarantee to ship your men home." The Englishman raised his voice, noting the democratic way in which the Riflemen stationed at that barricade were clustering around their commander. "You haven't any chance, you know, Walker is shut up in Virgin Bay. His men are dying of cholera, and he's treating with us for permission to board a steamer at San Juan."

"That is a lie," rasped Ormerod.

And Henningsen added quickly:

"I agree with Colonel Ormerod. It is not General Walker's habit to sail off and abandon his men, nor do I believe that he is in any peril from your forces."

"Suit yourselves," said Webster sourly. "This is your last chance, gentlemen. If you reject our terms we shall show no quarter."

"Have you ever?" challenged Ormerod.

"Well," replied Webster, raising his voice again, "we have treated kindly all your deserters."

"The men we have left are not the deserting kind," retorted Henningsen. "Is this all you have to say, sir?"

Webster scowled.

"I have much more to say. You have, perhaps, forgotten that Mr. Vanderbilt has taken an active interest in this little war. I don't mind telling you that whether you surrender or not it is a matter of only a few weeks before you and all other Yankee filibusters in Nicaragua will be as helpless as lizards in a saucepan."

Henningsen laughed scornfully, but there was a timbre of satisfaction in the spy's voice that inclined Ormerod to believe him. It was like the Commodore to plan some drastic stroke in secret; he would scarcely be content simply to furnish dollars and weapons. Not he! Strategy was his favorite diversion.

"There isn't any reason for you to stay longer, Webster," said Henningsen. "We aren't disturbed by your threats."

The Englishman's horsey face was twisted by a sinister smile.

"I rather thought you wouldn't be," he admitted. "Oh, by the way, I'm forgetting my real errand."

He produced a folded envelope from his pocket and extended it to Ormerod.

"From General Canedo. A little personal matter, he said."

Ormerod stiffened; his cheeks drained of blood.

"I have no connection with General Canedo requiring correspondence between us," he stated coldly.

Webster laid the envelope on the firing-platform of the barricade.

"Very touchy, aren't you?" he sneered. "——, you talk like an M. P. refusing a bribe."

Ormerod took a step toward him, and Webster scrambled up on the parapet.

"Oh, I'm going," he snarled. "Read the letter or leave it. I don't care. I told Canedo he was a fool to have anything to do with you. And that's what he is, a ——, lovesick fool, without the guts to—"

He stopped abruptly under Ormerod's threatening glare, and seized his white flag.

"Keep your hands off me," he warned. "I'm a noncombatant, a British subject."

"Keep your filthy tongue quiet, then," admonished Henningsen. "I should have no scruple against shooting a scoundrel like you, white flag or no white flag. You really came here as a spy to discover our situation; but I am so little concerned by what your friends can do that I welcome your investigation. Return to General Canedo, sir, and tell him that I will parley with him—at the cannon's mouth."

Webster's unpleasant smile expressed appreciation of this sentiment.

"That is the way to talk to greasers," he commented impartially. "An Englishman, aren't you, Henning—I beg pardon, yes, yes! General Henningsen, to be sure."

"I am not your kind of Englishman," replied Henningsen. "You had better go, sir."

After Webster was across the barricade Henningsen picked up Canedo's letter.

"I should read this, if I were you, Ormerod," he said kindly. "I am speaking as your friend, if I may, not as your commanding officer."

"I don't wish to have anything to do—"

"I daresay, I daresay. But, my dear fellow, this is from a man who must bear as weighty a burden of sorrow as yourself. Give him a chance to say to you what is on his mind."

Ormerod accepted the missive, frowning.

"You may be right," he assented unwillingly. "Humph! If it's a challenge, I warn you I shall accept."

But it was no challenge Ormerod read, only the proud grief of a man who knew he was condemned to a lifetime of misery, and who strove honestly, with whatever inadequacy, to react greatly to a great misfortune:

> In camp, Granada,
> Nov. 29th, 1856.
>
> SIR:
>
> It is unthinkable that we should be personal enemies after the immolation of her whom we both loved, however unworthily. Let her memory be a shrine in which we may jointly worship, and equally, a barrier to enmity. I would not wish in future to do you any harm, and therefore I acquaint you that I pledge undying hostility to the miscreant Walker, whose bloody hand dragged our dear lady under the point of the sword my arm wielded against him. He was the true author of her death, as he is of all the other ills which have oppressed our land since his evil shadow blighted our hopes of national happiness. Be advised, sir, and abandon a cause which must be accursed in your eyes by the specter of one cruelly sacrificed upon the altar of outrageous greed.
>
> I subscribe myself, with distinguished consideration, Your well-wisher,
> RAFAEL CANEDO.

A pitiful letter, with its turgid bluster and set phrases oddly mingled of vanity, hatred, puerile self-justification and bitter despair. Yet there was a note of genuine suffering that rang true.

"You were right, General," he said to Henningsen, refolding the letter. "I should have missed something if I had not read this."

XI

CANEDO proved he was not discouraged by attacking the churchyard wall again that night. There was no moon, and he evidently hoped to surprize the defense, but Ormerod's sentries heard the shuffling of feet in the distance, and a pair of six-pounders loaded with canister blew the column to shreds while it was eighty yards from the breach.

In the morning Henningsen resumed his advance toward the lake. Leaving a guard of Rifles under Gilligan in the Guadalupe, he shoved forward Ormerod, with the majority of the remainder fit for service, supported by a howitzer, and they fought their way, house by house, along the street that led to the Plaza, the street that presented their only possible path of escape. For several days the advance continued, delayed by continuous counter-attacks and the necessity of erecting parallel lines of barricades to maintain their communications with the Guadalupe; but at last they reached the open ground between the built-up streets of the ruined city and the lakeshore. Beyond this they could not go, for lack of shelter, of men and of ammunition. The allies in the old fort by the wharf commanded the shore as effectively as the garrison in the Guadalupe commanded the situation of the Americans.

So in the beginning of the first week of December the siege became a stalemate. Day after day the allies attacked the Guadalupe or some point in the long lines of barricades uniting it with a circle of entrenchments surrounding a couple of huts in the low ground which represented the maximum of Ormerod's advance. Day after day they were repelled, and day after day Canedo's efforts grew more perfunctory. After all, time fought on his side. He knew from occasional deserters that the filibusters had consumed all their coffee, had very little flour and were also coming to an end of their supply of mules. What he didn't know was that they were so short of caps that the Rifles were instructed to fire only when a certain target appeared, and even then, only if an attack was in progress. The diminished stock of canister was hoarded for use in a last resort, and the artillerymen were driven to constructing cannon-balls out of lead and scrap-iron poured in makeshift sand-molds.

The one alleviation in the lot of the besieged was the wiping out of cholera and typhus after the sick and wounded and noncombatants were transferred from the Guadalupe to huts in the low ground. But before disease was curbed it had reaped a toll of one hundred and twenty lives, and the rank and file available for duty, including men not seriously wounded, averaged few over a hundred in the last week of the siege. This demanded a killing amount of work from those able to stand, and Ormerod's gaunt, ugly face was whittled to the repellent leanness of an intelligent gargoyle; for he welcomed the opportunity to work until he dared not lean against a house-wall lest he fall asleep.

It was a drab story, this last week of the siege. Americans and allies both at the point of exhaustion, like two tired boxers who fall to the floor from the force of their own blows. An experience calculated to winnow the weak from the strong. Small wonder, then, that the germ of desertion recurred in the American ranks—altogether, forty went over to the enemy. But their comrades who remained were stung to a grim determination to hold on. It had been a good fight. A shame to spoil it, boys.

The worst aspect of the situation was the growing conviction that Walker was unable to aid them. Almost daily one of the lake steamers appeared off the Playa, out of range of the allied guns, but nothing ever happened, and unfortunately, no signals had been arranged.

" 'Reckon Uncle Billy's got his'n." "That's the reason we got to beat these dirty — —." "Aw, I'm tellin' yer Walker's through." "What d'ye mean—through? Say, feller, he'll be through the day they stretch him."

Then, one night—it was the 12th of December—the unexpected happened. Ormerod was inspecting the sentries at the Guadalupe when the sharp crackle of rifle-fire broke out north of the city on the lakeshore. In a minute the garrison were awake and at their posts, straining their ears to interpret the welcome sounds. "——, pard, hear that!" "Rifles, by hokey!" "Yeh, you can tell 'em from the greasers' guns." "You bet, old timer." "Comin' nearer! Hear 'em? ——, there's the flashes in the sky!"

Once the conflict seemed to recede; the sounds of firing died away in the distance. This was too bad! And the hungry men who lined the barricades wept and cursed in their disappointment. But after an hour the rifles opened up again, and much nearer. Soon the besieged heard faintly the stern, deep-chested American cheer, and an answering shout ran the circuit of the defenses. More cheering, with defiant yelps from the allies. Nearer and nearer drew the firing. Louder and louder the cheering. In the beginning, hugging the lakeshore, the relieving force had deflected inland, and Ormerod finally organized a detachment to push out and meet it, under cover of a preliminary bombardment with the long-cherished remnants of the garrison's ammunition. He was on the point of leading his men over the barricades when a howl came from the darkness.

"Hi, *cuidado!* Will you keell zhe frien' who come' to rrrescue you? Shut off zhe gun'. Zhere ees no 'air lef' on my 'ead."

"Who are you?" challenged Ormerod.

"Who? Who but Don José Maria Valle! I come from Majaire Jenkins to warrrn you he apprrrroach'. By me is he guide'. Poof! I take my lance, an' I stab in zhe air. Take zhat, *facciosos*, I say, take zhat *picaros! Mira!* In zhe backside zhey take it, for zhey know Chelon ees come, an' zhey flee. Ah, *muy pronto* zhey flee."

Ormerod laughed for the first time in two weeks.

"That's Chelon, beyond doubt, sir," he told Henningsen beside him. "No one could imitate his boasting." And he called out, "Come on in, Chelon. We won't shoot again. This is Ormerod speaking."

"Ah, my frien' Orrrmerrod," wheezed Valle. "It ees for you I come. For you I leave my 'orse and walk on zhe feet, me, who am so fat! For you I fight on zhe feet wizh zhe lance. But nevaire again! I tell you I am finish' wizh zhe grrroun'. Whoof! It ees no place for zhe lancer. I fall on zhe vine, I fall in zhe mud."

They heard him grunting under the barricade.

"An' 'ow do I climb zhis?" he demanded.

Ormerod scrambled on to the top and reached down a hand.

"A long pull and a strong pull," he invited. "Here, give me that lance."

"*Arriba con la niña*," wheezed Chelon, as Ormerod caught the lance and tossed it down to Henningsen. "Poof! I was not made to climb zhe barricade, not me. *Valgame Dios!* I am up. Let me keess you, my Orrrmerrrod. On zhe chik! So—an' so! A mos' brrave young man. To every one I say, 'He is as my son, *el Coronel* Orrrmerrrod. It was wizh me, Chelon, he firrs' rode to zhe war. I am prroud of heem. I, Chelon! *Sí, sí!*' "

He could have kissed all the garrison in that moment, from the stately Henningsen down to the shivering, fever-racked wretches in hospital, could faithful old Chelon. Ormerod, whom he had caught fairly, astride the barricade, only laughed again, and patted the Indian's fat back.

And half an hour later, as the false dawn whitened the sky over on the Chontales shore, Jenkins tramped in through a breach made for him in the churchyard wall—that breach so many had died to win and keep—

at the head of one hundred and sixteen men, who carried thirty wounded with them and had left fourteen dead on their way. One hundred and sixty American riflemen had sufficed to penetrate four lines of barricades, defended by two thousand allies.

"Howdy, General," drawled the frontiersman. "Shore am glad to see you, Pete. Mebbe youall figgered as how we'd forgot you, eh? Wa'al, I rise to tell you we had our share o' trouble, too. Never seed nothin' like it! Fellers on Ometepe all shot to ——, scared o' Injuns, scared o' their shadders. Fellers in Virgin Bay an' San Jorge an' San Juan rotten with fever, more babies 'n men. We had to keep the Transit open, 'cause we couldn't move unless we got recruits. By the etarnel, we was that shorthanded we dassn't stir 'till the Frisco and N'Orleans steamers come in last week with three hundred men." He waved his revolver behind him. "Hyah's some o' 'em. We call 'em the Second Rifles, seein' the old Second Rifles are underground. And say! Looks like the Fust Rifles had stood off a buff'ler stampede or suthin."

"There isn't much left of us, Major," replied Henningsen, smiling; "but what there is is worth saving. Good men, every one."

The wreck of the garrison tried to cheer. Of four hundred and twenty-one men, women and children caught in Granada by Canedo's attack, one hundred and twenty-four had been killed or wounded, one hundred and twenty had died of disease, two were captured and forty deserted. But they had exacted an usurious price for their losses. Upwards of twelve hundred allies had fallen before the barricades, and Canedo's motley array now had no other desire than to let these terrible *Yanquis* depart in peace. The allied commanders insisted that five hundred Americans must have been required to pierce their lines; and if there were five hundred more Americans in Henningsen's camp it would be a senseless waste of blood to resist his embarkation. ——, let them go.

Henningsen's men were equally anxious to be away. Of them all only Ormerod had any regret at leaving Granada. It was he who hauled down the red-starred flag of the filibusters from the tower of the Guadalupe; and after the rest of the garrison had marched out of the bullet-scarred structure he paid a last visit to the stone in the crypt floor which covered Maria de Avila.

He remembered the ancient Norse custom of rearing a hecatomb of warriors for the bier of a slain sea-king. There were hundreds of dead men lying about this crypt of the Guadalupe, men of Nicaragua, of Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, San Salvador, of Mexico, of the United States, of nearly every country in Europe, probably. Brave men, most of them, but none so brave as she. He wondered if their spirits formed a guard of honor to attend her to whatever afterworld awaited gallant souls.

The fancy pleased him, and as he went slowly up the stairs he tried to envision her dark grace in the midst of serried ranks of men made brothers by the leveling hand of death, the giant youth of *El Norte* side by side with the *Indios* and *mozos* of the Latin South. On the edge of the ruined city Henningsen had planted Valle's lance, and to the shaft was fastened a strip of mulehide on which was scrawled in red paint the legend:

"*Aqui fuê Granada!*"

"Here was Granada!"

BOOK VI

I

WALKER was roused out of his habitual phlegm when he received Ormerod in the cabin of the *San Carlos*.

"I have heard from General Henningsen of the deaths of Don Jaime and the señorita," he said. "My own sense of loss is peculiarly poignant; I realize that I am not likely to acquire again two friends so staunch and leal, however long I may remain in Nicaragua. But I appreciate that your loss is of a nature words are helpless to—"

He hesitated as Ormerod looked out the window with unseeing eyes at the crescent moon poised on one horn atop of Ometepe's perfect cone.

"I—Colonel Ormerod, I have known what it meant to lose the one woman the world held for me."

The depth of sorrow in his voice drew Ormerod's gaze back to his freckled face. The gray eyes that had always seemed as cold as flecks of agate were moist with unshed tears!

"I went to California, sir, because Helen Martin died," he continued, steadying himself by an obvious effort. "We had loved each other for years. Hers was a character to spur a man to the heights of achievement. Beautiful, she was born deaf; but she conquered that handicap—she would have conquered any handicap. In New Orleans she was a queen. When the Mardi Gras revels—but it serves no useful purpose to twist a knife in the old wound."

He broke off, then added inconsequentially:

"I even learned to read lips, and to speak in signs! We were to have been married in Mardi Gras week—1850, that was, six years ago—it seems longer. But the yellow fever—"

A shudder wrenched his slight frame.

"So I went to California," he ended. And after a pause:

"Men say I am cold and unfeeling. If I am, it is because affection was scourged out of my heart when she died. Better so! I would not wish to betray her memory in another woman's arms. Some men, sir, are capable of loving honestly more than one woman; but I am cursed—or blessed—with a singleness of purpose which precludes me from that consolation. All I can do is to strive to bend my life as she would have had me, in the belief that our Divine Father will bring us together again in that life eternal beyond the grave."

A light flared in his face that Ormerod had never seen there before.

"Without that belief, what a mockery life would be!" he said, as if to himself. "Belief and ambition, they are the parents of the will to labor—and labor, work, is a sovereign specific for all spiritual ills."

"I need work, General," said Ormerod. "I've got to work or go mad."

"I will give you all the work you can support, sir," Walker answered kindly; "but I do not see how you can do more than you have always done. And let me recommend you not to be unduly depressed. There is a moral factor in the degree to which we permit ourselves to succumb to grief, and time dulls the sorest ache. As Shakespeare truly wrote: 'Men have died, and worms ha' eaten them—But not for love.' It is the extraordinary man who finds one woman sufficient in his life."

"Let us draw a curtain across memories so agonizing and so barren of solace," he went on. "After all, my friend, the past is the past. Regret will not redress it. Address your mind to the future, and accept as cheerfully as you can the fate Providence allotted you. Remember, all you can do is to use your intelligence, and try."

The thin lips knotted in a wry smile, the only outright smile Ormerod ever saw on Walker's face.

"I speak, sir, as one who has trod the road ahead of you."

"But destiny, General—"

"Destiny is an immutable law of Providence, God's way of controlling human affairs. For example—" Walker's tone became lighter— "destiny decided that Mr. Buchanan should be elected President of the United States last month, as we have just learned. Mr. Buchanan is a believer in destiny of the manifest brand. Hence, he is no friend of your friend, Mr. Vanderbilt. From which we may argue that Mr. Vanderbilt is not favored by destiny, and will shortly be helpless to continue his machinations against us."

Ormerod forgot his own troubles in the recollection of Webster's careless boast.

"Don't be too sure," he protested earnestly. "The Honorable Billy claimed the Commodore had something up his sleeve to spring on you."

And Ormerod narrated Webster's declaration in as near the blackleg's original words as he could. Walker listened with courtesy, but shook his head in amusement when Ormerod had finished.

"My dear sir! The fellow's one thought was to induce you to surrender. The truth is, they are at their wits' end. What with the losses Henningsen inflicted on them at Granada, and the consequent dissensions amongst themselves, they will be unable to cause us any serious annoyance, now that we are concentrated on the Transit. We have even acquired command of the sea on the Pacific side. While you were mured up we armed a schooner, the *Granada*, and she succeeded in sinking a Costa Rican brig-of-war, the *Once de Abril*. The result is that they can no longer transport reinforcements by sea from Guatemala and Costa Rica."

"Vanderbilt won't strike on the Pacific side," responded Ormerod.

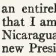
"But what will he do, Colonel?"

"If I knew, we should stop him at once," retorted Ormerod. "I hope I am wrong, General, but I am sure that you make a mistake to underrate the Commodore."

"Nonsense, sir!" insisted Walker. "As I told you months ago, it was one thing for

Mr. Vanderbilt to fight me when I was an unknown adventurer, a filibuster; but it is an entirely different state of affairs, now that I am the lawfully elected President of Nicaragua. Moreover, recollect that the new President at Washington will be helpful to us."

II



VANDERBILT'S blow was as sudden and as devastating as Ormerod had feared that it would be, the stroke of a master strategist, direct at the weakest point in Walker's position. It came, too, at a time when Walker was in the way to realizing all his hopes and ambitions, when the allies were disheartened by losses and lack of success and divided by mutual recriminations, when the filibusters' cause was most flourishing at home.

The reunited Americans had marched from Virgin Bay, with bag and baggage, park and ammunition train, for Rivas, which was abandoned in haste by its Costa Rican garrison, who retired to join the main body of the allies at Masaya. Under Henningsen's supervision, the Americans proceeded to transform the bloodstained town into a fortress, sufficiently strong to withstand the battering of heavy artillery and capable of defense by a handful of men, in accordance with Walker's desires. And while this work was in progress, Jenkins' Rangers and Valle's native lancers forayed the countryside from the Costa Rican frontier to the barriers of Masaya, unhindered by the enemy, who seemed anxious only to be left undisturbed.

As a matter of fact, the morale of the allies was broken by the terrible punishment they had suffered in the series of battles culminating in their disastrous attempt to overwhelm Henningsen in Granada. First and last, they had mobilized close to seven thousand men since the end of the rainy season, but casualties and desertions had reduced their total force to less than three thousand. They were no longer in the mood for battle. Instead, they dreaded lest Walker should a third time unleash against them his Rifles and the deadly blast of Henningsen's mortars and howitzers.

On the other hand, despite his own losses, Walker had in Rivas nine hundred and nineteen men, including one hundred and ninety-seven sick, many of them but slightly indisposed, and allowing for special details and departmental work, he could still muster a striking force of five hundred and eighteen, equipped with two twelve-pound howitzers, four twelve-pound mortars, three six-pounders and several lighter guns captured from the enemy. Moreover, two or three thousand recruits of first-rate quality were to join him in the next six months. And some fifty or sixty native troops remained true to their salt.

His plan, therefore, was to remain in Rivas for the present, and await the vanguard of the reinforcements who would soon come pouring across the Transit. When they arrived he intended to sweep the country clear of the allies, chase Don Patas Arriba out of Leon, reorganize Nicaragua on a valid, going basis, and then launch forth on the conquest of the four remaining Central American states. There was really no reason why he should not succeed. The Nicaraguans were still well disposed to him. If his destruction of Granada had offended the Legitimist southern districts, it had delighted the Democratic north. In every other state revolutionary minorities eagerly awaited the aid of the Americans in overturning their oppressors.

Several days after reaching Rivas he dispatched a party of officers in the lake steamer *La Virgen* to arrange for the expediting of the recruits, who would come mainly from New Orleans. Some of these officers were to sail north from Greytown, others were to return immediately to Rivas after transacting certain business at the eastern terminus of the Transit, and for their convenience *La Virgen* was instructed to anchor above the Toro Rapids in the San Juan river and await them there. The second lake steamer, *San Carlos*, was available to transport the eastward-bound passengers on the next San Francisco steamer, which was not due at San Juan del Sur, anyhow, for another two weeks.

La Virgen sailed from Virgin Bay a few days before Christmas, and in the bustle of fortifying Rivas and contriving a rough-and-ready celebration of the festival season nobody attached any suspicion to her failure to reappear before the *Sierra Nevada* anchored off San Juan del Sur on the afternoon of January 2nd, 1857, with several hundred passengers for the Eastern states. These passengers were escorted, as usual, over the Transit road to Virgin Bay, put aboard the

San Carlos and started off for the San Juan, where, in accordance with the mechanism of the Transit, they would be transferred to the iron sternwheelers for the trip downriver to Greytown. And in the meantime the *Sierra Nevada* took on coal and water, preparatory to embarking the California-bound passengers from the Eastern steamer, who would return on the *San Carlos*. But the *San Carlos* never did return. And neither did *La Virgen*.

Now, every one was suspicious. It was patent that something had gone wrong. The skipper of the *Sierra Nevada*, kicking his heels against the pilot-house as his vessel rocked on the ground-swell off San Juan del Sur, protested to Walker that an ocean-steamer, running on a government mail schedule, couldn't hang around indefinitely, and Walker acquiesced. After some discussion, the skipper agreed to head south for Panama, where he might pick up his mails for the West and learn what had happened beyond the smiling blue waters of the lake and the hazy blue ridge of the Cordilleras, and Walker and nine hundred-odd puzzled men in Rivas busied themselves to make the time pass quicker.

Ormerod asserted that whatever was wrong, Vanderbilt was at the bottom of it, but Walker was politely sceptical. The filibuster chief was inclined to suspect trouble between the Transit employees. If Mr. Vanderbilt had interfered and the steamers were in the hands of the enemy, why was it that the steamers did not reappear on the lake, where they could be exceedingly useful to the allies, and why did the allies continue to huddle disconsolately behind the barricades of Masaya? That was not like Latin-Americans, who were invariably whipped to electric activity by any slight success. Unanswerable arguments, to which Ormerod only shook his head.

But a week or so later his predictions were justified. The steamers reappeared on the lake, obviously in hostile hands; the allies moved out of Masaya, with bands playing, flags waving and *Indios* yelping, "*Mueran a los Yanquis!*" and marched confidently down the lakeshore to possess themselves of San Jorge, within striking distance of Rivas; and finally, the *Sierra Nevada* returned from Panama, carrying the west-bound passengers, who should have traversed the Transit three weeks previously—$25,000 Morgan & Garrison had spent to ship them by special steamer from Greytown to Aspinwall and thence across the Isthmus, the first of many additional expenses the Commodore would present his rivals in token of his esteem!—the mails and a sorry story for Walker.

Ormerod attended his chief during the interview with the messenger from Morgan & Garrison's Greytown office, who brought the tidings of disaster, and it seemed to the New Yorker that Walker had never shown to better advantage than when he was confronted with an absolute breakdown of all his plans and an imperative necessity to rebuild what he had believed was practically completed. Spencer, the messenger told them, had conducted a force of Costa Ricans on rafts down the San Carlos river to the San Juan, penetrating fastnesses no white man had traversed since the time of the Conquistadors.

Drifting down the San Juan at night, he had captured by surprize the American garrison stationed at the mouth of the Serapaqui, continued on down the San Juan to Greytown, where he had seized all the river-steamers, which were awaiting the coming of the Eastern ocean steamer, and then returned up-river in the stern-wheelers, taken *La Virgen* by a clever ruse, lured aboard her the commander of the American garrison in Fort San Carlos, at the confluence of the San Juan and the lake, forced him by a threat of execution to surrender his post, and to cap all this, trapped the *San Carlos* the day she steamed into the San Juan with the passengers from California.

Ormerod did not know which to admire most: the rascal, who had overcome obstacle after obstacle in carrying out Vanderbilt's orders, possessing himself of control of the Transit from the lake to the Caribbean, or Walker, whose face never quailed as he comprehended the measure of misfortune which had befallen him in the high tide of his success. The filibuster even acknowledged Spencer's adroitness.

"A most determined rogue," he remarked to the dismayed messenger. "I must admit his pertinacity, despicable as are his motives and those of his employer. This affair has happened at a most embarrassing time."

"Embarrassing!" repeated the messenger, an oily-haired head-clerk. "I should say so, General. What in tarnation are my employers goin' to do? It costs money to run ocean steamers, and here we have two lines—three, countin' the New Orleans service—running to dead-ends?"

"If your people will maintain their courage," answered Walker coolly, "and supply me with the recruits and arms I require, there will be no difficulty about reestablishing the Transit."

"Talk's cheap," sneered the messenger.

Walker stared at him bleakly, and presently the man turned his head away.

"Talk, as you observe, sir, is cheap," said the filibuster. "It is a commodity I have little traffic in. I shall send my aide, Colonel Ormerod here, to Greytown at once to investigate the situation. He will travel with one of my native officers along the line of the San Juan, in order to study the enemy's dispositions. You have no objections to such dangerous duty, Colonel?"

Walker addressed Ormerod with his customary severe courtesy.

"No, no, sir," Ormerod denied eagerly. "I'm tired of garrison-duty, as you know. Let me go! I'm sure I can get through, with some one like Chelon. We can travel at night, and lie up in the day-time."

"If any one can do it I am sure you can," assented Walker. "As for you, sir," he gave his attention again to the messenger who fidgeted on the edge of a chair, quite nonplussed, "return to Greytown, and advise your home offices to forward me every man they can find passage-room for. Colonel Ormerod and other of my officers will find means for employing our reinforcements against Spencer and his Costa Ricans."

"If it was anybody but the Commodore we'd stirred up," whined the man from Greytown. "He's p'ison-mean when he gets his dander rizzed."

Walker rose in sign that the interview was concluded.

"Mr. Vanderbilt," he said icily, "can harm me in no way, save by such secret assaults as this, and I assure you, and through you, your employers, that I can readily dispose of such assaults, providing my friends and supporters in the United States remain loyal. I am not the man, sir, to be defeated by a millionaire squanderer of dollars. My weapons are rifles and cannon—and iron is stronger than gold and silver."

"Yessir, yessir, General—Mr. President, I mean," flustered the messenger.

III

ORMEROD and Valle rode out of Rivas that afternoon, escorted by a little troop of lancers, the garrison remarking their departure with only casual interest because it had been published that they were on a foraging and reconnoitering expedition toward the Costa Rican frontier.

"Bring us a haunch of foine venison, Colonel Payter, sorr," hailed Mike Gilligan as they passed the barricade.

"I'll bring you something better than that, Mike," retorted Ormerod, laughing.

And Valle swayed ponderously in his saddle, stabbing his lance into the air.

"*Sí, sí, mi capitan*," he promised, "we brrring you zhe 'eads of a 'undrrred *hermaniticos*."

The Rifles at the barricade cheered good-naturedly. Old Chelon was universally popular. Then Ormerod touched up his horse, and the lancers spurred after him in a cloud of dust. They traversed the cleared *terraine* of leveled plantain patches, which Henningsen had created to give his guns a field of fire around the barricades, and plunged presently into the cool depths of the forest that spread southward and eastward to the wilderness of Guanacaste, where Nicaragua and Costa Rica met in a place undetermined to the satisfaction of both republics,

On the outskirts of a tiny *puebla*, under the foothills of the monster volcano of Orosi, Valle dismissed his troop, with many sighs and groans, entrusted his lance and frayed uniform to a sergeant, with direful admonitions against loss or damage to either, and grumbling like Orosi, itself, in an eruptive mood, donned the white shirt and trousers and cord sandals of a small cultivator. Ormerod was similarly garbed, and the two wiry *Indios* Valle had selected to attend them. Mules for all four had been purchased from various *ranchos* passed in their ride from Rivas.

Their way henceforward lay through a country which was all but trackless, inhabited by *Indios* who were half-tamed, where they dwelt by the lake and varying in degrees of wildness inland. Progress was necessarily slow; but Valle had the instinct of his race for finding the path, and they were able to keep their mules until they had passed the Rio Negra. From the vine-walled banks of this stream to the wide channel of the Rio Frio, which flowed into the lake close to the mouth of the San Juan, stretched a jungle innocent of any trail save those the wild beasts padded. At every step it was necessary to sever the lianas that wove their webs from tree to tree, and even Calle conceded the impossibility of attempting to hack a path for mules. Wheezing and groaning, calling dolefully upon the calendar of saints, protesting that his feet were full of *jiguars*, the fat old fellow toiled in the lead, his great strength and hereditary skill with the bush-knife making him the most valuable of the four in this taxing work.

When they crossed a tiny streamlet, now, they must be for ever beating the waters lest an alligator should shove its ugly snout out of the mud and pull one under. On the trail they must have eyes overhead for the coiled menace of python or tree-snake and underfoot for the gliding attack of the viper whose sting was death. Valle was concerned, also, for certain *Indios* who dwelt on the upper reaches of the Frio, and who waged relentless war with all strangers who approached their country; but as it happened, the travelers did not see a human being in a week, except for the naked inhabitants of a *puebla* on the lakeshore a few miles below the Frio's mouth, from whom they purchased a small dugout for a handful of silver coins and a bush-knife.

In this, paddling warily by night, they gained the San Juan and stole past the bulk of San Carlos, high on the opposite shore, relying on the current to give them motion, and on the darkness to make the sentries think them a floating log—which must have been the case, for they rounded the bend beyond the fort without detection, and paddling until dawn, turned the dugout into a screened back-water, where they lay hidden all day, fighting the mosquitoes and munching a meagre fare of plantains and cooked fish, which drew more protestations from Valle than all the hardships they had yet experienced.

The next night they passed the mouth of the Rio Melchora, which joined the San Juan from the north, and were disappointed in their hopes of running the Toro Rapids, as they reached the upper end of the broken water too late—or too early—for the attempt, in the judgment of their *Indios*. A mile or two above the Rapids they passed a camp-fire on the right bank, surrounded by a hunting-party of Melchoras, the same breed of squat, low-browed people Ormerod had seen the night he made the Transit with Jenkins and Cabot. The savages revealed no particular curiosity, but Valle was disturbed by the incident, although Ormerod took it lightly. The Melchoras seldom had any traffic with the country's few civilized inhabitants, and never visited Fort San Carlos or other military posts, in fear of "being tied up to a musket."

The third night they shot the Toro Rapids, an entirely different experience in the dark from ascending against the current in an iron-bottomed steamboat. Twice they were on the verge of capsizing, and Ormerod sighed with relief when they rounded a snaky bend into smooth water, and sighted the lights of Castillo Viejo on the right-hand bank. Their paddles drove them swiftly athwart the flooding stream, still babbling excitedly after its harried progress amongst the rocks, and they crouched low behind the shallow gunwales, inert, watchful, as the shadows of the trees embraced them.

And then a shrill Latin yelp from the left bank, at their very elbows: "*Aquí! Aquí! Los Yanquis!*" Other voices took up the cry. A torch of yellow flame leaped from a beacon-fire on the parapet of the water-battery, casting a wavery light across the river's channel, and half a dozen *bongos* and small boats darted across the river's channel, and half a dozen *bongos* and small boats darted from either bank, with a crackling of small-arms and flashing of bared steel.

Old Valle howled defiance, snatching at his bush-knife; his *Indios* imitated him, lips drawn back over grinning teeth. Ormerod unholstered his revolver, and tried a snap-shot at the nearest of the small-boats. Who was that man in the stern? Familiar, by Jove! He had seen that bottle-nose before. Yes, it was Spencer. Try another shot, then. How the —— had the scoundrel discovered them? The Melchoras? Not likely, still— Mind in a daze, Ormerod pressed his trigger, fretfully noting that he seemed unable to hit anything but water. He tried again. —— it, why did the dugout wobble so? *Whoosh!* It turned over under the impetus of a dinghy that caught it squarely bows on, and before he sank he had a glimpse of the river dotted with heads, Valle threshing about like a belligerent whale. When he came to the surface again he heard a dim shouting, felt a shock on his head—had an alligator nipped him?—and choked over a mouthful of water. Down, down, stars in his eyes, a pain in his chest. So this was death!

But it wasn't. He returned to consciousness to find himself lying on mossy stone pavement, firelight flickering in his face, Spencer's snarling voice distinct above the purring of the river and the chatter of the flames.

"Nope, Billy, it can't be done, I don't care what you say. The Commodore ain't a feller to fool with, and he gave me my orders so's I couldn't claim I forgot 'em."

"Oh, I say!" This was the Honorable Billy Webster speaking. "I never heard of such —— nonsense. My dear old man! He's as important as any of them after Walker. And who's ever to know—"

"Like —— they won't!" retorted Spencer "You don't know the Commodore, pard. He's got a way of findin' out everything he needs to know, and if he ever starts after you— Look what he's doin' to Walker! When I deal with him I do what I'm told. I say 'yes, sir,' and 'no, sir'—and you'll do the same."

"What about Valle?"

"We'll stand him up against a wall right now. Too bad the *Indios* with 'em got busted in the river. We could have had a nice little fusillade with three, huh?"

"Chelon is as big as three," said the Englishman with a nasty laugh.

Ormerod struggled to a sitting position. He was unbound, but very weak from immersion and the blow on his head. Figures blurred in the uncertain light; a background of Costa Ricans in dirty white, brown faces glistening with water, eyes gleaming cruelly; Valle's stout body, liberally corded with rawhide; and close by, the two spies, sitting on their haunches and swapping drinks from a flask of brandy.

"If you harm us, Spencer," Omerod exclaimed thickly, "Walker will shoot twenty prisoners for each of us."

Spencer and Webster turned their faces toward him, the American chuckling disagreeably, the Englishman with a muttered oath.

"Ho-ho," said Spencer, "the apostle of liberty is back from dreamland. Howdy, Mr. Ormerod—"

"*Colonel* Ormerod," corrected Webster, vindictively sarcastic.

Spencer bowed grotesquely, an attempt to ape Walker's courtly manner.

"I beg pardon, *Colonel*. Permit me to congratulate you on the toughness of your skull and the Commodore's friendship."

"That last is one thing that stands between you and a firing-squad," growled Webster.

"You dare not touch either of us," insisted Omerod.

"Don't I!" roared the Englishman. "*Aquí, teniente! Muy pronto!*" He beckoned to the tense circle of Costa Ricans, and burst into a flow of Spanish beyond Ormerod's comprehension.

A dozen of them sprang forward, and lugged Valle to his feet, then started to propel him over the flags toward the grass-grown wall of the water-battery. But the fat old Indian was undaunted.

"Hands off," he shouted in Spanish. "Dogs! Let me walk on my two feet. I am a lancer, I, Chelon, but it shall never be said that I was unable to walk to my death, if the good God decides I may not die on a horse, as I should wish. Hands off, I say! What? Do you fear me, bound and alone?"

He laughed hoarsely, and called to Ormerod.

"See, my Orrmerrrod, 'ow zhe *hermaniticos* fearrr ol' Chelon wizh zhe *riatas* upon heem! Wizhout my lance zhey fearrr me! *Mira!* If I 'ad here my horse and my lance, zhen you would see 'ow zhey rrrun. *Arrieros*, zhey are, muleteers, pig-tenders—"

A Costa Rican struck him with a musket-butt across the mouth, and he gagged on blood and broken teeth. Ormerod leaped to help him, but Spencer and Webster seized the New Yorker by the arms.

"No, you don't, my bucko," grunted the Englishman.

"Think I'm going to have the Commodore on my trail as long as I live?" howled Spencer. "He gave strict orders I was to see you weren't harmed. 'I don't much care what you do to the rest of 'em,' says he, 'but remember Pete Ormerod is my friend. I'll haze you from here to Hongkong, Spencer, if you hurt him—and if you do, I'll know.' "

Webster administered a twist to Ormerod's arm that drew a gasp from the New Yorker's lips.

"Bally nonsense, Syl! Come on, let's have a bit of sport with him, and send him to keep Chelon company. I can control these cattle."

He nodded toward the Costa Ricans, eagerly appreciative of the spectacle.

Spencer's answer was to bring down his fist upon the wrist that had tortured Ormerod.

"That'll do for you, Billy! I'm as hungry to chaw him as you, but I know where to stop—which you don't when you've got a skinful of brandy. You can give Chelon his needin's, but that'll have to satisfy you."

Ormerod was sick with baffled rage and grief.

"Walker will retaliate for this!" he gritted. "And he'll hang—"

"Walker's an addled egg," said Spencer contemptuously. "He'll never leave Rivas. Every one's against him at home; Vanderbilt's got the new President in his satchel. Even the *Indios* along here are against him, 'cause he's a Yankee, and they hate Yankees account of the Californians shootin' at 'em for fun and rifle-practise—that's why the Melchoras spilled it to us about you, my boy. And what's most important," he concluded bumptiously, "*I'm* against him. Yes, sirree, when Sylvanus H. Spencer gets after a man that man wants to begin orderin' his coffin."

Webster snorted.

"Modest, by gad! Who's drunk, now?"

"Maybe I'm drunk, but I got my wits about me," swaggered Spencer. "Are you goin' to line up a firing-squad? Or is that my treat?"

"I intend to get *something* out of this affair," retorted Webster; he shouted an objurgation to the dwarfish *teniente*, who commanded their natives, and a ragged file of muskets formed in front of Valle.

The old lancer proudly raised his bloody face.

"Poof, I spit on zhem!" he mumbled indistinctly. "See, my Orrmerrrod, I 'ave no fearrr of zhe *antropofagos*."

"What will you take to let him go?" cried Ormerod. "Name your price—anything I've got."

Spencer looked undecided, but Webster shook his head.

"Not this time, my Yankee friend," he answered, brutally deliberate. "I'd rather send Chelon to —— than any one but Walker—or you."

"Yes, if it was any one but Chelon," assented Spencer. "I always like to turn an honest dollar, but I'm afraid it would make trouble for us if the allies— You understand!"

He winked at Ormerod.

"I'll see the Commodore hears—"

"Tell him, and be damned. I'm not disobeying his orders. Go ahead, Billy."

"Wait a minute," pleaded Ormerod. And he called to Valle, "Is there anything I can do for you, Don José?"

Valle's fat body straightened with a quaint effect of dignity.

"Tell *mis amigos* 'ow Chelon make' to die. It ees bad zhat I do not 'ave my horse an' my lance, but I do not fearr zhe *picaros*. I am Chelon!"

His great chest expanded.

"*Mueran a los facciosos! Viva el General Walkair! Viva los Filibusteros! Viva—*"

"Oh, shoot the old wind-bag, and get it over with," rapped Spencer.

The *teniente* barked an order, raised his sword in air—it swished down, and the muskets spouted orange-red jets of flame. Valle swayed in the half-light, his chest and belly bleeding from a dozen wounds.

"*—los Yanquis!*" he panted. "*A Dios, mi* Orrmerrod!"

And he lurched to his knees, then pitched to one side and lay still.

"A good job, if you ask me," said Webster, with satisfaction.

Ormerod's mind was rocked by a black wave of hate.

"I'll make you pay for this," he sobbed desperately.

"Thanks for the warning, my good man," jeered the Englishman.

Spencer offered the prisoner the brandy bottle.

"Here, take a dram. You need it. Curse it, Billy, I don't care what you say, I've got to deliver him safe to the Commodore."

IV

DRAB weeks, those of Ormerod's captivity in Castillo Viejo. He was lodged comfortably enough in a sizable chamber opening off what must have been the orderly room of the commandant in the days of Spanish rule; he shared the provender of the garrison, such as it was; he was allowed plenty of exercise in the upper quadrangle of the works. But the unwelcome companionship forced upon him by Spencer and Webster, worry over the fate of his comrades, gnawing regrets at the failure of his own mission and the gloomy atmosphere of the old fortress combined to inspire him with a profound melancholy.

Webster, who now held rank as colonel in the Costa Rican service, was officially governor of the castle and in command of the river defenses, but the real leader of the enemy, Ormerod discovered, was Spencer. The Englishman remained at Castillo; Spencer, on the contrary, was continually up and down the San Juan, from Fort San Carlos to Greytown Lagoon. And Ormerod soon discovered, too, that Spencer's mental attitude was an accurate barometer by which to gauge the progress of the allies' cause. For the first week after Ormerod's incarceration, the Commodore's agent was very chipper and assured. Then, one day, his manner changed; he became hang-dog and sullen, cursed at Webster, cursed his employer, whipped any of the little native soldiers who offended him. But suddenly, a week or so later, his confidence returned.

"We've got Walker on the grid," he greeted Ormerod. "The —— fool! He attacked us three times in San Jorge, thought he could bleed us to death. But he wrecked himself. His men are deserting by the dozen, and Canedo is as safe as ever."

"Why doesn't Canedo go into Rivas and finish him?" Ormerod asked sceptically.

"Don Rafael will when he gets ready," asserted Spencer.

Ormerod noted, however, that the garrison was considerably depleted, notwithstanding the repulse of Walker's onslaughts on the main body of the allies; he estimated that Webster retained a bare skeleton company, and this could mean only that Walker must have succeeded in his objective in attacking San Jorge: that is, in crippling Canedo's initiative and pinning the numerically superior allies to the defensive. So he refused to be concerned, and his optimism was presently heightened, when Spencer returned from a trip down-river in a state of panic bordering on the ludicrous.

There were hasty conferences between him and Webster in the former orderly room, and Ormerod gathered that there had been a fight at the mouth of the Serapaqui, the post of Costa Ricans holding the lower reaches of the river had been dispersed and a body of Americans were that moment ascending to attack Castillo. He caught scattered phrases that amplified the story, as Webster and Spencer hastened to organize their position, withdrawing the outer-guard from the Water Battery, setting fire to the river steamers at the landing and the shacks and houses of the Transit establishment:

"We should have cleared the shrubbery from under the walls." This was a wail from Webster. "Well, who stopped you from doing it, Billy?" A snarl from Spencer. "But you always said they couldn't get up-river!" "How was I to know they'd tinker up a busted relic like the *Rescue* and get steam in her boiler and a crank-shaft that'd hang together?" "That was your job. You were supposed to know what was up." "Well, I never thought your blasted English fleet down there off Greytown would let four hundred Americans land and start raising ——."

Ormerod's heart beat faster. Four hundred Americans coming up-river! That sounded as if somebody was moving efficiently to reopen the Transit and fight through to Walker's aid. And that afternoon he heard in the distance the crack of American rifles, from a loophole in his cell-room saw puffs of smoke from a six-pounder which commanded the castle jetting over the greenery atop of a hillock—Nelson's Hill, this was called in memory of Lord Nelson, who, as Webster informed Ormerod, had captured Castillo away back in the latter days of the eighteenth century. From that hilltop every yard of the walls was commanded; the defenders would have to remain under cover. Likewise, as Webster profanely demanded of Spencer, "How were thirty-two greasers to hold this stone coffin against four hundred Americans?"

"Leave it to me," rejoined Spencer, and when a flag of truce approached the sallyport he met the demand for surrender with a promise to do so in twenty-four hours, if he was not relieved during that interval. The Americans, very busy saving one of the river steamers, which was but partially burned, and recklessly confident from the success which had crowned their efforts so far, acceded to this request. And Ormerod's heart sank as he heard Spencer boasting anew of the success of his ruse.

"Wait until dark, Billy. I'll take a couple of the greasers and sneak above the rapids. We'll get aboard one of the up-river steamers, make San Carlos before morning, load five or six hundred men and be back here in time to give those tenderfeet the surprize of their lives. You leave it to me. I'll fix 'em!"

He did. Ormerod the next day witnessed the arrival of the reinforcements from San Carlos, and with mingled amazement and dismay, saw the Americans literally take to their heels. Were these filibusters? Were these men led by Lockridge or Frank Anderson or Hornsby? Were they even Americans? It was incredible, but again he learned the truth from Spencer's boasting in the orderly room.

"Seems there's been a row among 'em. A new feller, that Titus, who bossed the border ruffians in Kansas, got the command. It was he I talked to. A big stuffed-shirt, Billy. ——, I was 'most ashamed to fool him thataway. He's got no more guts than a Mosquito Injun. Up and run from our greasers, without even a fight."

"Humph," commented Webster. "That kind of men won't help Walker much."

Nor did they. For a month Ormerod alternated between incipient hope and the depths of despair, as news of the fighting around Rivas sifted down-river from the lake—nothing very sensational, nothing to inspire his captors or to raise his own spirits, just the give-and-take of warfare. But in the middle of March the word came up-river from Greytown that the Americans there, encouraged by the arrival of several additional companies from New Orleans, were going to make a second attempt to take Castillo Viejo.

Ormerod gathered confidence from the flustering of Spencer and the awakened vigilance of Webster, but in a day or two he perceived that they had learned their lesson, and were not to be caught napping again. They turned their men into the jungle, mowed a wide area around the walls and entrenched the summit of Nelson's Hill, encircling it with chevaux-de-frise and storing it with supplies to maintain a garrison. So when the Americans steamed around a bend in the San Juan, loaded like cattle in two rickety steamers and a couple of crank barges, it was to find a fortress impregnable against anything except battering fire—and the biggest gun the attackers possessed was a six-pounder.

A little group of slouch-hatted officers climbed a slight elevation near the river and reconnoitred Nelson's Hill and the approaches above the Water Battery. Their dejection was obvious to all who watched them from the castle. Ormerod, at his loop-hole, saw it as clearly as Spencer and Webster, alternately slapping each other on the back and draining bumpers out of a brandy bottle in the shelter of a sentry-box. He was no more surprized than the two spies, whose efforts had ruptured the vein of communications so imperatively necessary to Walker's success, when the steamers warped around in the stream and returned down-river without having fired an effective shot.

That was a sleepless night for him. In the orderly room adjoining, Spencer and Webster caroused with their Costa Rican subordinates until the floor was strewn with human brandy-casks.

V

THE Greytown contingent of filibusters had scarcely turned their backs on Castillo Viejo when tidings reached Webster that Walker had attacked San Jorge a fourth time. There was much jubilation among the Costa Ricans over Canedo's success in beating off the Americans, but Ormerod was impressed by the fact that the bulk of the reinforced garrison were promptly transfered up-river on the sternwheelers, obviously to fill gaps in the ranks of the allied troops watching Rivas. Spencer accompanied the replacements, very self-sufficient over his achievements, assuring Ormerod that Walker's finish was at hand.

"He's shot his string, can't keep his men any longer—even the Californians are deserting. We're going to rush him in Rivas. ——! We'll smash him to pieces."

But the spy returned a week later in a mood of sullen disgust.

"We couldn't hold 'em to it," Ormerod heard him say to Webster. "Lost six hundred, and never reached the barricades. What do you hear from Greytown?"

"'*Filibusteros* mostly gone," answered the Englishman. "Our navy people are evacuating 'em to Aspinwall."

Spencer banged his fist on the orderly room table, at which the pair sat.

"By ——! I b'lieve I'll go down-river and get off word to the Commodore on the Jamaica Mail steamer." He jerked his head in Ormerod's direction. "Get rid of him, too, eh? No point in keeping him—the Transit's safe for us."

"Too bad not to send him after Chelon," grunted Webster.

"We've settled that. I'll ship him North, and he can square his accounts with the Commodore."

Ormerod intervened with some heat.

"Suppose I don't want to go North? You can't hold me prisoner in Greytown."

"Come back, and I'll shoot you," invited Webster.

"Go where you please," Spencer answered indifferently. "Except up the San Juan. I sure will let Billy shoot you, if you show 'round here again."

Ormerod ignored the gibe. He was trying to figure how he could reach Rivas, on the Pacific side, from Greytown, on the Caribbean coast. Panama was the logical route, of course, but he must have money.

"By the way," he asked, "are you intending to return me the personal funds you took from my money-belt when I was captured?"

Spencer scratched his head uncertainly, but the Englishman retorted—

"You can't prove that they were personal funds."

"I reckon I might give you the price of a New York passage," offered Spencer. "Yes, I'll do that. I'll buy you a passage."

He chuckled.

"That makes you think, don't it? No, sirree, Mister Colonel Ormerod. What you do on your own don't concern me, but I don't aim to pay your way to Rivas, neither. Not even for the pleasure of seeing you shot."

VI

THE sternwheeler steamed into Greytown lagoon on the heels of a tropical downpour, which shredded into mist under the last rays of the sunset. The jungle by the river-mouth dripped with moisture, vividly emerald. Punta Arenas, across the roadstead, loomed clear-cut against a dull skyline, the Transit wharves and storehouses deserted and empty. Closer at hand lay several British men-o'-war, corvettes and sloops, yards squared, funnels smoking lazily; a riffle of drums, the brazen strokes of bells ringing the hour, drifted over the smooth surface of the lagoon. Two coasting schooners, unkempt slatterns, rode farther inshore. Outside the warships were anchored two larger vessels, a Danish brig and a Mobile barkentine, Ormerod heard the deck-hands telling Spencer.

He remembered his earlier enthusiasm for the smell of water.

Greytown! Once it had represented the threshold of adventure. This evening it was the doorstep to failure. But if Ormerod was depressed, Spencer was boisterous.

"Now, then! Now, then, laddy-buck! Shake a leg. Come on, you haven't any baggage to wait for. You and I are going ashore to confabulate with Jock MacPherson. We'll see what the chances are for sending you back to the Commodore, eh? Had enough o' Nicaragua, ain't you? Sure! I shouldn't wonder but what you'll be the only one of Walker's men to get out. And Sylvanus H. Spencer saved you! Don't forget that—Syl Spencer that never fails. ——your eyes, can't you look polite? No more manners'n a *mocho!*"

They were rowed ashore in a small boat, and landed on the untidy beach at dusk. Ormerod had never been in Greytown, but Spencer picked his way without any trouble, cursing at the half-naked blacks that blundered occasionally in front of them, to the big shack that housed the bar-emporium-hotel of one Jock MacPherson, a ruddy-bearded exile from Sutherland, who came as near to being the ruler of the "port" as any one of its inhabitants. He received his two visitors with stolid unconcern.

"Oo, aye, there's a Rrrroyal Mail due i' the morrrnin'—or it micht be a day late frae Aspinwall. Aye, for Kingston. Nae, ma man, the Yankees hae quit. The *Tennessee* was the last boat they'll send."

"Quit?" Ormerod exclaimed angrily. "Nonsense! What do you—"

MacPherson combed the tangled masses of his beard, and surveyed the New Yorker out of impassive blue eyes.

"Hae it ye're ain wa', man. 'Tis all one to me. But Morrrgan an' Garrrrison are nae seelly, feckless loons. They wullna scatter gude siller i' the sea tae run ocean-steamerrs empty."

Spencer slapped his hip.

"And that's the finish of Mr. President-General Walker," he crowed. "Mac, on the strength of your news I'll try some of that imitation whisky you palm off on the Transit people."

MacPherson placed bottle and glass on the board top of the bar, carelessly brushing a cockroach to the floor.

" 'Tis nae gude news tae me," he rejoined. "Business wull nae be the same wi' the Transit stopped."

"It won't be stopped long," Spencer declared confidently. "Soon as we have Walker under ground the Commodore will—"

"Have you any objections to my going outside?" interrupted Ormerod.

Spencer drained a full tumbler of liquor.

"Nope," he leered. "Give you the freedom of the beach, Ormerod. Have a drink, first? Come on, you better! No hard feelings."

"I'd as soon drink with an alligator," answered Ormerod.

"Gentleman's got a quick temper," Spencer solemnly informed the impassive Scotsman. "Too bad, but he's my guest—'till I get him aboard that Royal Mail. Great friend o' the Commodore. I picked him up the night we bagged Chelon. Saved him mos' special—" a second tumbler followed the first—" 'count o' the Commodore, you see. Mos' special friend o' Commodore. But if 'twasn't for that I'd have shot him long ago. Billy wanted to. You know Billy Webster?"

"Aye," grunted MacPherson, staring from one to the other of them.

"You should have seen Billy pop off Chelon. He—"

Ormerod flung himself outdoors in a blind rage. If he had possessed a weapon he would have killed Spencer in that moment. Yes, he fumed, killing was almost too good for the brute.

The night was pitch-dark, a ruck of clouds low beneath the stars, and no moon. The open sewer that did for street was innocent of any lights, but once in a while a moderate glow shone out from one of the few more pretentious huts. Pigs grunted, babies cried. Somewhere a man was beating a woman who shrieked in guttural, negro-Indian patois. Stumbling on haphazardly, Ormerod came presently to the deserted beach, where the tide lapped gently and the riding-lights of the anchored vessels were dim yellow blobs dotted on the night's purple canopy. It was lonely and very quiet. But stay! What was that sound carrying distinctly over the lagoon. An American voice. And singing.

Ormerod walked down to the water's edge, and listened attentively. He could hear the slap of a paddle, then the voice once more:

"—And the place where this young man did live
Was Penn-syl-va-ni-a."

Tom Jenkins? It couldn't be. But the singer drew nearer:

"Blow, ye winds of morning,
Blow, ye winds, heigh-ho,
Blow, ye winds of morning,
Blow, blow, blow."

Tom Jenkins, by ——! And certainly drunk.

"Tom," Ormerod called gently. "Tom Jenkins! Where are you?"

The paddle ceased splashing, and after an interval of silence a guarded query floated out of the night.

"Who's thatair? Who's askin' for Tom Jenkins?"

"It's Ormerod. I—"

"I got ye covered, stranger. Don't ye lie to me."

"But it's I, Tom. It's Pete Ormerod. I just came down-river from Castillo."

"Waall, I'll be ——! Now, who'd have reckoned you an' me would meet up thisaway, Pete. Why, cuss me for a greaser, I s'posed all this time you was dead. Everybody did. But I want to see you, Pete. Here I come. Whoop!"

Much splashing, combined with mighty grunts, and a dugout canoe drove up on to the beach in a shower of foam, pitching out its single passenger almost at Ormerod's feet. Ormerod bent to assist him, but Jenkins rose with a lithe celerity that proved him physically capable, even if he was drunk, a contingency Ormerod reverted to immediately.

"Look here, Tom," as they shook hands, "are you drunk?"

Tom's grip tightened with that steel-spring vigor Ormerod had noticed the first time they met in San Francisco.

"I reckon mebbe I am a mite. Fact is, Pete, I come over here to do a leettle fancy shootin'—thought I might git me one o' theseyere English navy men that treated us so p'ison-mean."

"No, no! You'd get into trouble," protested Ormerod. "But we'll settle that later. Tell me how you came here."

"Why, the general sent me 'round by Panama after we done heerd Chelon was killed."

"Oh, you know that!"

"Shore. Chelon's men had it moughty quick. But they never heerd what become o' you, and knowin' how Spencer and Webster was down on you, Pete, we figgered 'twas more'n likely they'd put you to sleep quiet, so's we couldn't hang it on to 'em. So the general sent me 'round to see what could be done here, in your place, as you mought say."

"If I could only have gotten through!" grated Ormerod.

"You couldn't have done nothin', Pete. I never seed such a ruckus as went on here. Every feller from the States that brought his own company wanted to be in command, and the new fellers and the old fellers quarreled, and the English navy men kept a-comin' into our camp and askin' our folks to claim they was held ag'in their wishes, so's they could git free, and thar was no doctors an' a heap o' fever and— Waall, I dunno what didn't go wrong. Mebbe the general could have fixed things if he'd been along, but he waren't, an' I ain't so shore he'd been able to herd a *ramuda* like we had. 'Twaren't to be, I figger. We got to win this yere fight over on t'other side o' the lake."

"But how can we get there?" Ormerod inquired eagerly. "MacPherson just told Spencer—"

He sensed, for he could not see, the sudden tensing of the frontiersman's wiry figure.

"Spencer! Is he here?"

"Yes, he's up at MacPherson's, but—"

Jenkins locked a hand around Ormerod's arm, and urged him up the beach.

"I come over here to do a leettle shootin', like I said afore," the scout remarked coolly. "Looks kinder as if my medicine was workin' good tonight. The most I figgered on was gittin' a gold-braided Englishman that'ud try to come the lord over me. But Spencer! I shore am glad we met, Pete."

The deadly, slurring voice, falling in a liquid monotone, was as sinister in Ormerod's ears as the hiss of a snake. A few minutes past Ormerod had felt the same lust to kill, but as he walked beside Jenkins he commenced to have qualms of conscience. This deliberately going forth to shoot a man didn't seem right.

"You can't do it," he said.

"I aim to be yore pard," returned Jenkins, "but I don't let no feller tell me what I cain't do."

"You'll simply be arrested, Tom," insisted Ormerod. "The English will catch you, even if the Sambos and the trading people don't. You won't stand a chance."

"Shore, I will," said Jenkins, undisturbed. "I got me a berth in that barkentine lyin' over ag'in' Punta Arenas. Her skipper's a Georgy man, and he's sailin' on the ebb in the morning. He'll stow me away. He'll stow you away, too, Pete. We'll run down to Aspinwall, and git acrost to Panama, and after that I'll call myself a tenderfoot if we cain't make San Juan del Sur, and from thar to Rivas— Huh! Are you with me, pard?"

Ormerod stopped in the middle of the muddy lane—if it deserved that name—and by sheer strength compelled the scout to halt with him.

"We're going to settle this sensibly," he announced. "First off, Tom, how d'you happen to be here? Aren't there any other Americans who may suffer if you—"

Jenkins twisted and cursed with a ferocity that warned Ormerod of his condition.

"—— you, Pete! No man ever held me back when I was on the warpath."

"I have," declared Ormerod, maintaining his hold on the frontiersman, "and I'll do it again, if you can't satisfy me. What about other Americans?"

"Thar ain't none," Jenkins replied savagely. "The English sent 'em all down to Aspinwall to make the New York mail-boat."

"Did you wait to do this shooting job?"

"No, I waited 'cause I figger on gittin' back to Walker—and the fellers the English shipped off ain't got a Chinaman's chance o' that."

Ormerod reflected. He felt his own anger rising once more as he thought of Spencer's casual boasting of Valle's death to the Scotch trader. The skunk! But he shook his head doubtfully.

"Tom, I'd like to see Spencer drilled, but what's the use of risking ourselves?"

"We don't risk nothin'," answered Jenkins. "My friend, Cap'n Hazzard, will see us safe. He despises the English an' all Spencer's breed."

The scout's hard-bitten hawk-visage came closer to Ormerod's.

"One shot's all I need. Then we bust for my dugout, and if we're caught afore we make the *Geraldine* I'll bite the sights off'n my own gun."

Ormerod found himself yielding.

"He deserves it, Spencer does," he acknowledged. "But it ought to be fair, Tom. I tell you what, you lend me your gun, and I'll—"

Jenkins snorted.

"I ain't lendin' my gun to nobody. I'm aimin' to do my own killin'."

"Will you give him a fair show?"

"Depends. I'll give him the draw, if that suits ye."

"I couldn't ask more," agreed Ormerod. "All right. But no more shooting, remember."

Jenkins indulged in a thin, acid laugh.

"Mebbe I'm drunk, Pete, but I got some wits left. These yere English are wuss'n Comanches, and I'm dustin' for cover soon's we clean up Spencer. Don't you worry none about me."

They followed the crooked way in silence, until they came to MacPherson's shack, now lighted by a pair of ancient battle-lanterns hanging above the bar. The Scotchman stood behind the counter, rubbing a cloth reflectively over its soiled top, while Spencer talked loudly and filled himself another glass of whisky.

"Why, Mac, the big fat slob had a dozen bullets in him, but he could still beller like a pig. Took a heap of killin', he did. He—"

Jenkins passed the low doorway with the noiseless tread of an Indian.

"Spencer, you —— hound!" he snarled. "I don't reckon you'll take such a heap o' killin' yoreself. Draw!"

Spencer spun around, his jaw dropped, his eyes glassy. MacPherson, after one glance, continued rubbing at the table-top, simply moving a step to one side.

"I thocht ye'd ganged i' the *Tartar*, Jenkins," he observed calmly.

"I had a lettle job o' work to do fust," replied Jenkins, his gaze fixed on Spencer, whose mouth wabbled loosely.

"Ho-how do you come here, Tom Jenkins? Y-y-you better pull your freight. I'll speak to Captain Cockburn. He's my—"

"Draw," repeated Jenkins.

"—friend," concluded Spencer.

Ormerod slipped into the room.

"I asked Jenkins to give you a fair show, Spencer," he said, "but if you won't take advantage of the chance, he'll shoot, anyhow."

Spencer's eyes focussed gradually upon his two enemies.

"Y-y-you'll shoot me down—without a—chance?" he babbled.

But Ormerod saw the spy's right hand stealing toward his belt.

"Look out, Tom!"

"I'm a-lookin'," growled Jenkins.

And as Spencer's gun came from the holster the scout's .44 leaped in air like a living creature, with a rumbling boom and spurt of flame. Spencer was flung back against the bar, and sprawled sidewise, a startled expression on his face as the life faded from his eyes.

MacPherson ceased polishing the bar-top to peer down at the man on the floor.

"Deid as MacGregor's mare," he commented. "If ye'll be guidet by me, ma men, ye'll gae whar the English canna reach ye."

Ormerod accorded him a glance of interrogation.

"Oo, aye. I'm nae friend tae yon rat. But gae quick—or ye'll hang high. The English are unco prejudeeced on shootin'—they're a speeritless race."

"Shore, I'd like fine to git me an Englishman, too," said Jenkins, his promise of caution forgotten.

"You come with me, Tom," exclaimed Ormerod, and propelled him into the street.

Negro voices chattered hysterically all about them, but not a man showed in their path as they raced for the beach.

VII

BY THE time they had launched the dug-out every man, woman and child in Greytown had joined the hullabaloo, and the trilling of a boatswain's whistle aboard the nearest man-o'-war proclaimed the early intervention of authority. But the clattering oars of the whaleboat which put off from the sloop drowned entirely the stealthy paddle Jenkins wielded, and they reached the side of the *Geraldine* unnoticed. Several sailors peered down at them, disappearing like automata as a tremendous voice roared from the poop:

"Get below, yo' swabs." And then, more moderately, "Are yo' there, Major Jenkins, suh?"

"Shore, it's me, Cap," rejoined Jenkins, catching hold of the foot of a rope-ladder. "Fotched a friend with me."

A large head, grizzle-bearded, popped into the light of a lantern.

"Was it my fancy, Major, or did I heah a shot?"

"You did, Cap."

"Ah, in that case, suh, I recommend that yo' sink the canoe. I will lower yo' an ax."

Jenkins motioned Ormerod up the ladder.

"Thisyere is a one-man job, Pete. You git on deck. Tell Hazzard who you are. He's the true ore."

When Ormerod straddled the rail he perceived that the large head crowned a small body, very chunky and square.

"Yo' sehvant, suh," Captain Hazzard greeted him. "Any friend of Major Jenkins, as the saying is! Yo' name, suh? Ormerod? Not Colonel Ormerod? I am honored, suh, honored, indeed. I have had the pleasure of heahin' of yo', both by perusal of the public prints and from the lips of Major Jenkins. Yo' are triply welcome, Colonel, fo' yo' own sake, as Major Jenkins' friend and as one of Walker's officers. I am honored, suh, honored."

Jenkins pushed a lank leg over the rail, and dropped an ax on the deck.

"That's done, Cap," he said. "Waall, me an' Pete cleaned up right handsome—and it didn't take long, neither."

"Did yo'—" Captain Hazzard paused delicately.

"Nope, I didn't git me an Englishman, Cap; but that —— hunk o' coyote-meat, Spencer—"

"Misteh Vanderbilt's man?"

"That's the one. I give him a fair show, like Pete here said I should. But you know the English!"

Captain Hazzard drew his square body very erect, and extended a hand to Jenkins.

"I do, suh, and heah is my hand in pledge that they shall not take yo' off this ship, except oveh my dead body, and after desecratin' the Stars-and-Stripes. Yo' have my congratulations, Major Jenkins, suh. In removing that unmitigated scoundrel, yo' have conferred a benefit upon yo' country and insured the prospe'ity of the human race. Come with me, if yo' please."

And he conducted them, to the accompaniment of a steady flow of conversation, down a companionway and through a door into one of the middle holds, where he stowed them comfortably behind a tier of box-goods, with an old sail to lie on.

"I regret, gentlemen, that I should be under the unfo'tunate necessity to show yo' such stinted hospitality; but until we are across the bah I consider this measure essential to yo' safety. Aftehwards I shall endeavor to make adequate amends."

He made adequate amends several hours later, Ormerod thought, when they heard his bellow from the deck!

"Stand off, Limies! —— yo' eyes, do yo' think I'll pehmit any bloody-backs aboa'd my ship? What do I care who killed Spencer? Yo' say Greytown is undeh yo' protection—why don't yo' keep ordeh, instead of annoyin' American ship-mastehs at this hour? No, suh, fo' the last time yo' can not come aboa'd. I have a revolveh in my hand, and I will not hesitate to shoot to protect my country's dignity. Sheer off! Yo' will learn, suh, there are still Americans who remembeh 1812. ——, suh! Complain to my consul or any one yo' please or send me a cartel, and I will meet yo' wherever yo' say between Mobile and Cartagena."

The Englishman sheered off. Several months before one of the station-ships at Greytown had boarded a Morgan and Garrison liner over the protest of her master, and the resulting bad feeling had inspired the Royal Navy with a recurrence of respect for American sensibilities, so the boat's crew rowed on to the near-by Dane and hazed her master to recompense themselves for the rebuff Captain Hazzard had given them. But the redoubtable little Georgian refused to be puffed up over his success.

"The English, gentlemen, are accustomed to bullying the seamen of otheh nations, and they will continue to do so until otheh nations take measures to preserve their rights. I am accustomed to protectin' my own rights. I am not the chief mechanic, suhs, of a floatin' boileh-facto'y."

"We can't thank you enough, Captain," Ormerod answered gratefully. "You've not only saved our lives, but made it possible for us to try to rejoin General Walker."

Hazzard bowed profoundly.

"Colonel Ormerod, suh, in those words you have rewa'ded me mo' than amply. It is my chief regret that from what I heah our igno'ant fellow-countrymen have elected to the chief magistracy of the Republic a Misteh Buchanan, who is so unpatriotic as to pehmit himself to be jealous of General Walker's glo'ious triumphs."

"I don't quite follow you," said Ormerod, puzzled.

"My meanin', suh, is that the new President resents General Walker's stand against the annexation of these te'itories. As an exponent of so-called manifest destiny, he does not favuh an independent American government in Central America. It appeahs, also, from the repo'ts circulated in the public prints, that he is so mean a person as to be undeh the thumbs of va'ious Yankee gentlemen, such as the Misteh Vanderbilt who is called Commodore."

And the Georgian's sneer was eloquent testimony to his opinion of Vanderbilt.

"That is bad news," said Ormerod.

"Suh," returned Hazzard, picking up the lantern by which he had guided himself to the fugitives' shelter, "yo' need not be conce'ned on that score. The South has still to be heard from, and when the South speaks in General Walker's favuh, Misteh Buchanan and the time-servehs in Washington will see fit to change their minds—or the organs which they so term. But I must leave yo', gentlemen. The tide slacks at dawn, and I am anxious to put to sea without fail. Yo' sehvant, suhs."

VIII

AT ASPINWALL Ormerod and Jenkins parted regretfully with Captain Hazzard, who was equally sorry to see them go.

"Obligation to my owners, gentlemen, is all that p'events me from accompanyin' yo' on this glo'ious venture. I beg yo' will p'esent my most respectful consideration to General Walker, and assure him he has the sympathy and admi'ation of the South."

But at Aspinwall, along the line of the Isthmian railway and at Panama, they heard news which indicated the increasing seriousness of the filibusters' plight. The New York mail-steamer, just in, brought confirmation of Jock MacPherson's statement that Morgan and Garrison had withdrawn their steamers and abandoned the attempt to reopen the Transit. President Buchanan was said to be bitterly hostile to Walker's plans; naval officers recently had arrived from the North to take over the command of the vessels of the Pacific squadron, and one of these officers, Commander Davis, was already at San Juan del Sur in the *St. Mary's*. It was common gossip among Americans and foreigners on the Isthmus that Davis had secret instructions to dispose of Walker by the easiest means practicable.

From Rivas, itself, poured a flood of rumors and assertions; the Americans were short of ammunition and living on mule-meat; desertions, rather than casualties, had sapped the force to less than half its original strength. One bit of satisfaction Ormerod and Jenkins derived from the mate of a Callao-bound clipper, which had put in at San Juan for water, who said that the allies had been terribly cut up in an attempt to storm the barricades a week past—"the Guatemalans were wiped out; Davis's officers say they lost eight hundred during the day." Evidently, then, Walker was still able to strike hard blows at need.

Passage for San Juan was not easily arranged, but finally, they found a half-breed skipper of a pearling schooner, who agreed to ferry them the five hundred miles North for a roll of the gold Jenkins carried in his money-belt. He was a villainous fellow, with a villainous, verminous, *Americano*-hating crew, and Ormerod and Jenkins took turns in standing watch in the filthy little cabin every night of the voyage—and when the rascal protested against this distrust, at first with objurgations to the saints, then with curses and taps on his knife-hilt, Ormerod knocked him down, while Jenkins held the crew cowed at the muzzle of his revolver. They had no trouble after that, and dropped anchor off San Juan on the afternoon of a day late in April.

The anchorage held three vessels, the saucy war-schooner *Granada*, flying Walker's red-starred flag; the *St. Mary's* and the British man-o'-war *Esk*. There was a twinkling of steel on the beach and in the streets of the port, and Jenkins wagged his head thoughtfully.

"'Taint our fellers, Pete. We couldn't have that many to spare. Humph! I reckon we better git aboard the *Granada* and see what Cap'n Fayssoux has to say. He's a —— fine officer, if he has got barnacles on his pants."

Grumbling and cursing, the pearler's crew launched a small boat, and with Jenkins' revolver always ominously in view, rowed their passengers to the *Granada*, a miniature copy of her big neighbors in trigness, precision and disciplined conduct. On either broadside was a six-pounder, varnished and tompioned; a watch-officer, very smart, glass under arm, tramped the ridiculous quarter-deck; lookouts were stationed for'ard, and an orderly stood in the waist. Ormerod and Jenkins were received with every man-o'-war ceremony, Fayssoux, himself, being called from the cabin as they came over the side.

The *Granada's* captain was a dark-browed young Southerner, earnest, sincere and intelligent. He greeted his visitors with surprize at their appearance and dismay as they unfolded the full tale of disaster on the Atlantic coast.

"We heard reports of this," he said, "and the general has received some confidential information; but it seems impossible that Morgan and Garrison should abandon us—and I don't understand how your people at Greytown could have failed so dismally, with five hundred men, Major Jenkins."

"You'd oughter have seen 'em," returned Jenkins. "Foolishest lot o' big-mouths I ever heerd too."

"Well, talk won't mend it," Fayssoux exclaimed unhappily. "You ought to get to Rivas as soon as possible. You know the trails, Jenkins."

"Shore do," affirmed the scout.

"I'll land you up the coast tonight. The Costa Ricans are in San Juan and along the Transit road. You'll have to work across country to the north. And that reminds me. I wish you'd tell the general Commander Davis is going to see Canedo. I believe there is something in the wind from the way the *St. Mary's* officers talk."

"What can it be?" put in Ormerod. "They wouldn't land bluejackets?"

"I hardly think so. No, it's probably an attempt to put pressure on us indirectly."

"What condition are we in at Rivas?" asked Ormerod.

"A bad one," Fayssoux admitted; "but Canedo is no better off. The general will probably want to withdraw, when he hears definitely from you the Transit is closed."

"Can he get through the allies?"

"Not a doubt of it. And he can put his men aboard the *Granada*—we'd be crowded, but we'd manage somehow—and run north. The Democrats in Leon are sick of the war and the allies. The Leonese troops in the lines around Rivas refuse to fire on us, and they're wild about Chelon's death. Oh, we have several hands to play."

Jenkins scowled out of one of the open port-holes at the two warships lying farther inshore, their rows of cannon gaping at the single six-pounder that peeped over the *Granada's* shallow bulwarks.

"I don't trust these yere navy men," he said. " 'Twas the English warships did for us at Greytown, allus sendin' search-parties into our camp and invitin' the men to desert and tellin' Spencer an' Webster whatever we was up to. Now, I s'pose, them varmints—" he jerked a thumb toward the *St. Mary's*—"will 'bush us here. The general's purty good, but he cain't fight Central America *and* England *and* the United States."

"And Commodore Vanderbilt," Ormerod amended dolefully.

"——! All Vanderbilt does is spend money," retorted Jenkins.

And Fayssoux added, almost haughtily:

"The opposition of a rich merchant can scarcely suffice to endanger an enterprise of the scope of General Walker's, Colonel Ormerod."

IX

FAYSSOUX shook hands with Ormerod and Jenkins at the edge of the jungle.

"You won't find it difficult to slip through," he said. "All our scouts make it. Just remember that the allies' camps of observation are as I described. I think you'll find the best place is between the Transit trail and Cuatro Esquinas. Good luck! And don't forget to tell the general that Commander Davis is up to something."

Jenkins grunted impatiently as Ormerod thanked the young Southerner; Fayssoux ran back to his boat, and they dived into the shelter of the jungle, exchanging the starlight of the beach for the impenetrable darkness beneath the close-woven branches. Ormerod was promptly lost, but Jenkins headed unerringly in the line he designed to follow, picked up a trail presently, branched from it to another and stopped only when they came to the Rosario road, with hoofbeats thudding toward them. Ormerod would have scuttled across, but Jenkins clutched his shoulder.

"Lancers, Pete!"

And sure enough, Ormerod detected the unmistakable rattle of lance-butts in stirrup-cups, and the slurring intonation of Latin voices. The lance-shafts formed a bristling hedge over figures slumped wearily in their saddles, pennons drooping in the windless air, as the troop passed at a slow trot.

"No guts," hissed Jenkins, tugging his elbow in sign to go on. "Know what they was sayin'?"

"What, Tom?"

"They're ridin' to San Juan to escort Davis up to Rivas in the mornin'. Said he was goin' to make the *Yanquis* give up. Said if he didn't they's none o' 'em ever git off alive. No guts!"

"That doesn't sound so good for us," answered Ormerod. "Davis—"

"——!" snapped Jenkins. "What kin he do, any more'n yore Commodore Vanderbilt, 'cept nerve 'em to fight us a mite longer?"

Ormerod held his peace, admiring, although he could not imitate, the indomitable egotism Walker communicated to his familiars.

The pair toiled on through the night, mile after mile, over cattle-trails, abominable roads, and sometimes across open country. Several times they passed isolated *ranchos* or *pueblas*, where dogs barked at them; but they neither saw nor heard men again, until, close to dawn, the high-pitched "*Alerte!*" of the Costa Rican sentries at Cuatro Esquinas sliced through the chill early morning air, and the tang of wood-smoke from camp-fires drifted to their nostrils.

Jenkins abandoned the trail they had been following in the direction of the footway leading from Rivas to the Transit Road, and struck off into a succession of plantain thickets, which brought them to the margin of Henningsen's cleared zone. They were in the midst of this when they were challenged from the barricades.

"Who comes there? Two o' you? ——! Advance, two, and let's have a look at you."

Ormerod grinned, despite the forebodings that plagued him. It was so characteristic of the filibusters, care-free, easy-going, entirely assured of themselves. And so was the sentry's response to their identification:

"Hey, Guard! Orf'cer of the Guard! Colonel Ormerod's alive—and here's Major Jenkins back again."

He helped them scramble over the wall of adobe blocks, and he and his comrades, who came running in response to his cry, patted them on the back, demanded to hear of their adventures, offered them treasured "chaws" and nips from '*guardiente* flasks—"you kin have everything but grub, gents, and that you got to wrastle for yourselves out o' the commissary, what there is left." The officer of the guard, who arrived last of all, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, was Mike Gilligan.

"Glory be, it's never yerself, Misther Payter! Who ever heard the like? Why, it was kilt you was, up on that —— river, wid Chelon! And Major Jenkins! Faith, sorr, where did ye drop from? Is the Greytown b'ys comin'?"

"Take us to General Walker, Mike," replied Ormerod. "We have a lot to tell him. How are you all?"

"Ah, we're foine as Paddy Hennessey's pig that niver ate. Barrin' that, we're in graand shape. The greasers is licked, and all the white-livers has deserrrted—"

"Shore o' that, air you, Mike?" interrupted Jenkins.

"Yes, sorr. Last week the general got so sick of it, he made a proclamation offerin' passes to all that wanted to go, and there was only five wint. Thim that's left is rale fightin' lads. All we lack is food."

"That's important, Mike," Ormerod remarked.

"Ah, there's lashin's of food in the counthry. We'll foind it whin we lave Rivas."

Men kept running out from the houses along the narrow street, so that Ormerod had no time for more conversation with Gilligan, especially as one of the first to hail him was Henningsen, as gaunt as any private, but speckless in apparel, his brown brush of beard glossy and well trimmed, his blue eyes jovial and confident.

"You are one of those legendary characters who rise from the dead," he called to Ormerod. "Hullo, Major Jenkins. We can use two officers like you. The general will be delighted."

He ordered off the curious soldiers who flocked around the newcomers, and led the way to Walker's headquarters, chatting casually of the incidents of the siege. The sun rose as they entered the Plaza, and Ormerod's memory harked back to the first time he had seen it that day of bitter fighting when de Morbecque and Fletcher Cabot had paid the price since exacted from so many of their comrades. The cathedral, which had been the Americans' citadel, stood to one side, battered by cannon-balls, its walls pocked and holed. Noticing his glance, Henningsen observed:

"Our enemies have a pair of twenty-four-pounders that might be troublesome if they were better artillerists. The only good gunner they had, an Italian, we captured."

"They couldn't carry the place, then?" asked Ormerod.

"Not in three years, sir," returned Henningsen, with decision, "so long as we possessed rifle ammunition and food."

Mike Gilligan had run ahead to warn Walker of their coming, and the filibuster chief was up and partly dressed when they entered his quarters. Ormerod saw, with some concern, that he had grown painfully thin and pale. But if privation and care had worn him, the gray eyes gleamed with the same cold fire as of old, the freckled face was set in the same delicately firm lines, the low voice rang with the same iron determination. He was as self-confident as he had been when he sat as president in the Government House at Granada, with no opposition to him worthy of the name inside the country's borders.

"It is a great pleasure to see that you are safe, gentlemen," he said. "Especially, Colonel Ormerod, for we had supposed you were killed with Don José, Colonel. And I heard that the force at Greytown were to be removed to the United States, so I supposed Tom was taken from us, too. Well, do you bring good news?"

Ormerod looked at Jenkins, and Jenkins, shuffling awkwardly to, answered:

"Waal, General, we ain't agreed on that p'int. Pete, he thinks things is bad. I think they're no wuss'n they have been, seein' our fellers made sech a tenderfoot showin' at Greytown."

"I'll talk to you about that later," replied Walker. "Tell me, is it true Morgan and Garrison have suspended their steamers?"

Jenkins nodded, and Ormerod said:

"There's no doubt of it, sir. It is reported, also, from the United States that President Buchanan is definitely against you, and that the Navy Department has instructed its officers in the Pacific to dispose of you by any means possible."

"I fail to see what the Government of the United States has to do with a rebellion against the president of Nicaragua," said Walker coldly. "And short of actual intervention, it will be impossible for American Naval forces to—"

"Captain Fayssoux asked us to tell you that Commander Davis is to visit Canedo," put in Ormerod. "We passed the lancer escort going down to fetch him here this morning. Fayssoux thinks Davis 'is up to something.' Those were his words, General."

Walker glanced across at Henningsen.

"I daresay Davis would like to see us ruined," he said. "Eh?" And as Henningsen expressed agreement, "But the man can't harm us." He swung back facing Ormerod again. "It isn't possible, sir."

"You forget the pressure Vanderbilt can exert, and the Abolitionist—"

"I forget nothing," declared Walker. "Mr. Vanderbilt has done his utmost in barring the Transit and frightening our craven supporters into withdrawing their steamers."

The slender body throbbed with an intensity of purpose Ormerod had never seen him reveal; the gray eyes blazed.

"We have fought the allies to a standstill. They have brought seven thousand men against us. They have barely two thousand left. I have—" he snatched a paper from his desk— "three hundred and ninety men fit for duty, besides one hundred and seventy-three sick and wounded, many of them able to fight. I could break through the allied lines to San Juan del Sur whenever I chose. I should have done it before this, but I remained in Rivas, in order to be certain of establishing contact with the troops from Greytown in the event of their forcing a passage of the San Juan. Now, there is no longer any reason for my holding this place. I shall evacuate it immediately, march to San Juan del Sur and sail north for Realejo to resume the campaign in the North."

Henningsen nodded approval.

"It can be done. I'll stake my reputation on it."

There was a rap on the door, and in response to Walker's summons Mike Gilligan entered. The Irishman saluted and laid a sealed letter in front of his commander.

"Sorr," he said, "this is from Commander Davis. A Nicaraguan flag left it at the barricade."

"Thank you, Captain," replied Walker. "You need not remain." He slit the flap. "Ah, gentlemen, Fayssoux seems to have known what he was talking about. Davis writes that he will be at allied headquarters this afternoon, and proposes that I open negotiations with him there for the purpose of arranging terms for the abandonment of Rivas and my own removal aboard his vessel, on his guaranty of the personal safety of all of us."

He let the letter fall to the desk, an abstracted look upon his face.

"Shore, you'll tell the —— skunk you ain't counted coup for nothin'," growled Jenkins.

"On the contrary, Tom," answered Walker calmly. "I shall not give him an opportunity to claim that I am a trouble-maker. General Henningsen, I appoint you and Colonel Ormerod to wait upon Commander Davis so soon as he announces his arrival. Let us see what he has to say. Afterward—Ah, perhaps, we shall have something to tell him. In the meantime, Colonel Ormerod, you and Tom must secure some sleep. I'm ready to discuss the orders of the day, General," he concluded to Henningsen.

X

COMMANDER DAVIS moved uneasily in his chair. It was hot in the low-roofed chamber of Canedo's headquarters—the half-ruined *rancho* of Cuatro Esquinas—which had been assigned for his meeting with Henningsen and Ormerod; and the Naval officer sweated under his heavy woolen uniform coat. He was middle-aged and conscientious, slightly pompous in bearing, inclined to be dictatorial in speech, harassed by a situation which was bound to make trouble for him no matter how he handled it.

"That is all very well, gentlemen," he said, "but it will be impossible for General Walker to reach the North by sea because I intend to seize the *Granada*. The terms embraced in the allies' memorandum, which I have handed you, are final, not to be debated."

There was an interval of silence. Henningsen was frankly surprized; Ormerod felt his forebodings realized. So this was the way Walker's enemies had elected to defeat him! Much simpler, after all, than landing bluejackets.

"Would you mind repeating that statement, Commander?" Henningsen asked, with a hint of sarcasm.

"I am resolved to seize the *Granada* before I sail from San Juan del Sur, which I must do within a couple of days," Davis answered stubbornly. "The *St. Mary's* has other duties to perform."

Ormerod's legal mind automatically analyzed this reiterated statement.

"You have instructions to that effect, sir?" he inquired.

"I have instructions which seem amply sufficient to me," retorted Davis.

"Ah, from the new Administration?"

"I have heard from the new Administration," said Davis, flushing; "and nothing in my dispatches has altered my original instructions."

"But this is a very extraordinary course you threaten," replied Ormerod. "You are going to seize by force of arms a vessel flying the flag of a country with which the United States is at peace, a country in process of reorganization by American citizens."

Commander Davis's choler increased.

"I am going to remove a source of danger to international peace," he asserted. "General Walker's cause is hopeless. He has set all Central America by the ears, and if he isn't removed, willy-nilly, the lot of you will be killed, and I don't know what calamities ensue."

"We are quite capable of taking care of ourselves, sir," intervened Henningsen, "providing you do not take sides with the allies."

"I am not taking sides with the allies," denied Davis. "I am operating under orders to save American lives."

"So those are the terms of your orders?" inquired Ormerod. "Do you regard them as justifying the seizure of the *Granada?*"

"They will do," the Naval officer answered doggedly.

"And you mean to say, sir, that you contend you have orders to seize the *Granada?*"

"I have orders authorizing me to go so far as that step, yes," said Davis, with a return of his uneasiness.

"From whom, sir?"

"From my commander-in-chief."

Ormerod took up the quizzing.

"Then we may tell General Walker,

Commander, that you have definite orders to seize the *Granada* and to join forces with our enemies?"

"You are trying to put words in my mouth, sir," flared Davis. "I say simply that I intend to seize—"

"You are quibbling, I am afraid," Ormerod interrupted coldly. "Are General Henningsen and myself authorized to assure General Walker that you have definite orders to seize the *Granada?*"

Davis rubbed his chin uncomfortably.

"You are at liberty to repeat what I have said, gentlemen," he answered at last; "but I would prefer that you regard all this as left unsaid, and simply consider me as operating on my own responsibility."

"That's a very substantial responsibility to assume, Commander," said Henningsen.

"It is, sir," returned Davis curtly. "And the question of its assumption is for me to decide."

Henningsen looked across the rough table at Ormerod.

"There seems to be nothing for it but to report this amazing situation to General Walker, Ormerod."

"Nothing, sir," agreed Ormerod.

Henningsen hooked up his sword and rose.

"I trust you can recall this incident with satisfaction to yourself in the future, Commander," he remarked scornfully. "Your intervention defeats us. But for that the American cause in Nicaragua would triumph within the next few months."

Davis controlled himself by an effort.

"I must remember the strain you are under, sir," he said fussily. "As for my conduct, I am responsible for it to my superiors. But personally, I prefer to believe that I am making it possible to save the handful of poor wretches remaining in Rivas. I can assure you I have not had an easy task in securing pledges from General Canedo and the allied commanders for your lives, General Walker's especially."

Ormerod was shaken by a volcanic burst of passion. Behind the Naval officer's smug words he sensed the interplay of politics and finance, rude admonitions from Vanderbilt to the puppets at Washington who posed as great men, conferences of oily-tongued thimble-riggers in that corner room of Willard's, subtle appeals to the narrow intellect of the apostle of manifest destiny recently established in the White House, whose betrayal of the filibusters, his disciples, constituted—had Ormerod but known—a fitting initiation of four years as shameful as American history ever could produce.

"We are not asking you to protect our lives," he answered, his ugly features twisted into an angry mask. "All we want is the chance to protect them ourselves. You, sir, you are no more than a tool for men who use you to belittle their country!"

"This is no language for men in your position to employ," cried Davis. "I cannot tolerate it, sir. It is an insult to my rank—"

"Oh, —— you and your rank!" snapped Ormerod, and flung himself from the room.

Outside Henningsen caught up with him.

"Very unusual language for plenipotentiaries, Ormerod," he said, smiling; "but I'm not sorry you used it. Of course, the man can't help himself. He must have stringent verbal orders, and he probably knows he'll be made to carry any blame for the whole affair; but that doesn't help us out. Where are our escort?"

A little group of allied officers dissolved, and Canedo approached them, a different Canedo from the sullen, swaggering young fellow Ormerod had known in Granada. His face was lined by care; there was a haunted look in the corner of his eyes.

"You are ready to return, gentlemen?" he asked in his perfect English. "Colonel Ormerod, I shall be obliged if you will take a message from me to General Walker. You recall I swore undying enmity to him? Pray assure him for me it is by no doing of my own that I forego personal vengeance. I am unable to resist the pleas of our allies, and if we refused to accept the intervention of Commander Davis, no doubt the United States would see to it that we suffered otherwise." His voice was impregnated with the bitterness of thwarted hatred. "Ah, life is as hard for a little country as for a weak man. When the last invader has left our shores I shall turn my back upon a world so prolific of injustice!"

Ormerod regarded him with pity.

"I hope, Don Rafael, you have no disposition to rashness," he said slowly, uncertain of the other's exact meaning.

Canedo understood him.

"I am a Catholic, sir," responded the Nicaraguan. "For me suicide in unthinkable—although, indeed, I am not quite so weak as that, whatever my actions may seem to—"

"No, no," exclaimed Ormerod. "I did not mean—"

"I am sure you did not, sir. You are a gentleman. So I will tell you what I have told nobody but my confessor: I shall enter the Church."

Before Ormerod could reply he called abruptly to a pair of his officers, bidding them escort the envoys back to Rivas.

"*A Dios*, Colonel Ormerod," he added. "General Henningsen, I kiss your hands. You have been brave enemies. As such I esteem you, and I trust Providence will grant you a better fate than my demerits have earned for me."

Then he turned and walked rapidly into the gathering darkness of the night. Mounting their horses, Henningsen and Ormerod heard the rattle of arms as the sentries saluted his brilliantly-uniformed figure.

"Too bad the man isn't more of a soldier," grunted Henningsen. "I hate to think of being beaten by these people."

Ormerod choked on the embers of his rage.

"It wasn't Canedo who beat us—or all Central America. It was the Commodore. Oh, if the general only would have listened to me!"

"That's the fault of most great men," said Henningsen dryly. "They won't listen. But if they listened to every one, you know, they wouldn't be great."

XI

"I SEE, I see, gentlemen. Yes, you did all that was possible. Humph! It is too bad, rather inglorious. Let me think."

Walker bent his head until the chin rested on his chest. Ormerod wondered what he was thinking about. Self-reproach? Not likely. Bemourning the downfall of his hopes? Perhaps. Fanning a gust of resentment at his enemies' success? It might be. But the filibuster's next words indicated no concern with these matters.

"I am unable to discover any means by which we can continue without the *Granada*," he said as impersonally as he were discussing an ordinary business venture. "It is not pleasant to contemplate, but Commander Davis has called checkmate on us. You agree with me, gentlemen?"

"We can scarcely undertake more than one day's march, with one hundred and seventy-three sick and wounded on our hands, and almost no transport," answered Henningsen.

"It's the end," Ormerod muttered in a strangled voice.

Walker regarded him with some surprize.

"Why, not quite that, Colonel Ormerod. No, I shouldn't say that. The conclusion of a chapter, possibly."

"You don't understand," objected Ormerod. "Vanderbilt has turned every one against you, even the new President."

"You are always inclined to exaggerate the importance of Mr. Vanderbilt's hostility, sir," replied Walker, with the chill hauteur he employed to terminate any disagreeable subject. "We still have behind us the power of the Southern States. Yes, and the West will not forget the men who died here for American principles. President Buchanan shall yet rue his hasty act. As for Mr. Vanderbilt—" he made an impatient gesture with his hand— "he has done his worst. When we begin again we will discount him at the start."

The indomitable determination of the man made Ormerod almost ashamed. By the light of a guttering altar-candle, in a dilapidated, mud-walled room in the shot-torn ruins of Rivas, surrounded by enemies outnumbering him five to one, disowned by the country that had fathered him, the fruits of two years' fighting gone by the board, Walker's mind turned, not to the past, but to the future, his one concern was how to reap victory out of present defeat.

Ormerod extended his hand.

"Don't think I'm not with you, General. When the time comes to try again I'll be there."

"And many more of us," Henningsen assented heartily.

Walker exchanged clasps with them very gravely.

"This is no more than I expected, gentlemen. But we anticipate matters. We have still to settle this deplorable misfortune. You arranged terms?"

Henningsen produced a slip of paper.

"You and sixteen officers of your staff, sir, are to embark upon the *St. Mary's*, to be conveyed in her to Panama. Commander Davis regrets he is unable to provide accommodations for a greater number." Henningsen hesitated. "Both he and General

Canedo—ah—stated it would be advisable for you to lose no time in proceeding to San Juan del Sur as soon as the capitulation has been completed. There is considerable—ah—feeling against you amongst the enemy's troops."

Walker nodded coolly.

"I see. Can Commander Davis rely upon the allied officers to observe the terms he makes?"

"I believe so, sir," interposed Ormerod. "Canedo sent you word by me that he foregoes his promise of personal vengeance upon you at the solicitation of his allies and Commander Davis. He means it, sir."

"Yes, I'm sure he does," affirmed Henningsen. "But that scoundrel Webster is in the enemy's camp, and he might incite some drunken Indian to fire at you."

"My death will come in God's good time," Walker answered evenly. "Let us put my person out of the conversation. What of my men?"

"The officers are to retain their side-arms. Rankers will surrender their arms."

"Artillery and ordnance?"

Henningsen's face lighted in a grin of derision.

"They forgot to mention those, sir. I propose, with your consent, to destroy all guns, powder, cartridges and caps."

"Good," approved Walker. "And the disposition of the men?"

"Officers and men, other than your staff, are to be conveyed to Panama in charge of a United States Naval officer; deserters, who have gone over to the enemy, to be kept separate from the troops in Rivas."

"I have no fault to find with that, General. But what about the native troops?"

"They are guaranteed protection and unrestricted residence in Nicaragua."

Walker sighed, the one exhibition of feeling he permitted himself during an interview which must have racked his soul.

"Then there is nothing to do but reduce the terms to writing, General Henningsen. When you have done so I will sign them, and you can return to Commander Davis in the morning. Good night, gentlemen, and thank you for faithful application to an unpleasant duty. I know you have enjoyed it no more than I."

Ormerod had a feeling of unreality as he followed Henningsen out into the Plaza. Was it as simple as this to write *finis* to a great adventure? Henningsen must have had somewhat the same thought, for the soldier of fortune turned to his companion, and said:

"I have seen the collapse of two heroic causes, the defeat of the Carlists in Spain, the failure of Kossuth in Hungary. Neither of them had a leader to compare in nobility of spirit with that little man inside there. He's a great man, Ormerod, even if he won't listen to advice. And how is he different from Napoleon, who persisted, against all worth-while advice in tramping into Russia?"

A dozen officers gathered around them, questioning eagerly. Was it true they were to surrender? What about the greasers? It was here in Rivas they had butchered the wounded twice. The Navy would look after that? Well, that was one good thing.

"An' begorry, we can't be afther gettin' less to ate than we have in this dirrty hole of a place," commented Mike Gilligan. "An' the fightin's been awful poor come three wakes, now."

"Waall," drawled Jenkins, after Henningsen had outlined the terms, "I shore am glad we ain't lickin' the dust for a passel o' greasers. But jest the same, I cain't see much difference 'twixt Americans that'll lay down on their own blood and the orneriest *hermanitico* out o' Costa Rica."

"Hear, hear!" Applause came from all quarters. "Them's my sentiments, Tom." "He's right." "I'm atellin' you that's good talk." "Yes, sirree, he's talkin' a good pipe."

And one man, swinging his hat over his head in the darkness, cried:

"Three cheers for the Red Star, boys!"

They responded with a will, then gave three more for Walker, and three for the comrades who lay in graves scattered all the way from Masaya to Guanacaste, and from the Pacific to the Caribbean. The cheery readiness with which they accepted disaster shocked Ormerod, until, suddenly, he realized that most of them were only boys. Yes, even the officers averaged from eighteen to twenty-five. They surveyed the future with the arrogance of youth, the most gently reared of them hardened to recklessness by the multitude of dangers they had survived.

"The last night," cried one. "There's a couple of jugs of '*ardiente* need killing in my quarters, friends."

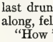
"Count me in," answered the restless shadows. "Fair enough, Harry." "One last drunk on greaser p'ison, huh?" "Trail along, fellers."

"How 'bout you, General," the host asked Henningsen, "and the colonel?"

"Thanks," replied Henningsen, laughing, "but we have work to do. Don't forget to drink to our future success, gentlemen."

"Five or none," a gay voice responded, and the group made a chorus of the slogan.

XII



FIVE o'clock in the afternoon of May 1st, 1857, Ormerod saw the slender array of the garrison mustered in the Plaza, watched while Henningsen and Commander Davis strode into the midst of the hollow square, listened while Henningsen read the last general order, No. 59, which Walker issued to the filibuster army of Nicaragua. The resonant, soldierly voice carried clearly to the cathedral steps:

"Reduced to our present position by the cowardice of some, the incapacity of others, the treachery of many, the army has yet written a page of American history which it is impossible to forget or erase. From the future, if not from the present, we may expect just judgment."

Henningsen read to a conclusion, said a few words by way of instructing the troops that they were henceforth under the jurisdiction of the United States and must obey the orders of Commander Davis as they had those of their own officers, then stepped aside for the captain of the *St. Mary's*, who, awkward and ill at ease, made very much the same remarks and ended by telling the Americans they were to march out of the Plaza between two lines of allied troops, pile their arms and take the road later for San Juan del Sur, whence they would be transported as soon as possible to the United States.

This was Ormerod's cue, and heartsick, he mounted his horse, and trotted slowly from the Plaza, past a group of allied officers on the corner by the cathedral, among them Webster, gaudy in gold-laced jacket and képi.

"Hi, there, young-feller-me-lad! Not so fast."

Ormerod reined in.

"What is it, Webster?"

The Englishman swaggered into the roadway.

"So you came back? A fat lot of good you did."

"I haven't anything to say to you," returned Ormerod, perceiving the man's intention to fasten a quarrel on him.

"No, I'll wager you haven't—not after doing in Syl Spencer, the way you did! Shot him in the back, begad!"

"I did not kill Spencer," replied Ormerod, "although I would have done so very gladly."

"What's the use of lying? You did for him, and treaty or no treaty, I'm going—"

From the group of allied officers Canedo's voice exploded in brusk command. Several ran forward and caught Webster by either arm as he reached for his pistol.

"Ride on, please, Colonel Ormerod," Canedo called in English. "I am sorry for this distressing incident, but you should leave Rivas at once, if I may advise you."

"Leave Rivas?" yelled the Englishman, struggling furiously with his captors. "Nice gratitude you people show, letting the man go free who killed Spencer! Where'd you have been, without us? Where? Answer me that! Why, —— your puny, worthless—"

"Thanks, Don Rafael," acknowledged Ormerod, and spurred ahead. Webster's ravings pursued him until he had rounded the corner.

At the South Barrier Walker awaited him, with the officers of the staff who were to accompany their leader on the *St. Mary's*. Ormerod saluted.

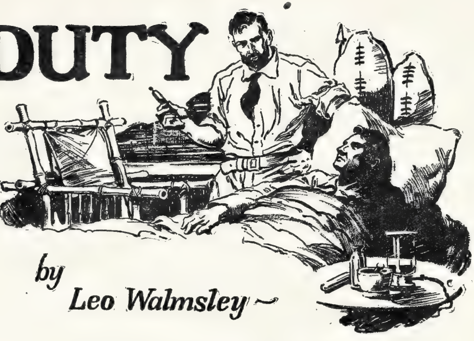
"The surrender has been completed, sir."

Walker picked up his reins, and motioned to the Guatemalan officer, who was to escort the party to San Juan del Sur.

"Very good, Colonel Ormerod. We will proceed, gentlemen. General Henningsen will follow with Commander Davis."

The allied pickets presented arms as the cavalcade passed down the trail, swarthy *Indios* from the Guatemalan hills, staring idly at the little gray-eyed man, who rode alone, with his gaze fixed on the far horizon.

DUTY



by Leo Walmsley

Author of "Toro of the Little People," 'Namba The Terrible," etc.

THERE is no road to Kaveli; no way save by the lake, and the occasional service maintained by the African Trading Company's small wood-fuelled steamer, the *Alice*, or by privately chartered native *dhow*. The cloudy cliffs of the Mapana Mountains hem it close in on the east. The lake, so blue and clear to the west and south, merges to the north in the Piti-Piti Swamp, which itself spreads out a hundred square miles of sleek deadliness and completes the terrestrial isolation of this outpost of civilization.

Kaveli consists of a native village of two hundred huts, a small store run by the A. T. Co., and the tin bungalow of the district commissioner, built a hundred feet up the mountain slopes. Insignificant though it may seem, the place has a political importance. It is situated on an international frontier. Even in the rainy season, the district commissioner remains in residence, to attend to such matters as a frontier perpetually gives rise to, to administer white man's law to the ten thousand odd blacks who inhabit the Kaveli district, and generally to uphold the prestige of that flag which droops so tiredly from the flagstaff in Kaveli's market square.

Sturdee, the district commissioner, was writing his monthly report when a servant announced that a *dhow* containing a white man was drawing in to the landing place. He got up at once, and went down to the lake-side. He saw a tall, swarthy, grim-looking man step out of the boat and advance stiffly toward him.

"Mr. Sturdee?" he said. "My name's Heald, of the Natal police. Hope I'm not troubling you. Possibly you'll guess my mission."

The two white men made a curious contrast. Sturdee was shorter than the other. He was clean-shaven. He had a generous mouth and chin, his eyes were brown and kind, and imaginative. He was dressed in immaculate white. The newcomer was dirty and ragged; but even his rough bush clothes he wore as though they were uniform. There was something ruthless, hard, cruel in his poise.

"No; I can't say I do," said the commissioner. "Unless"—he hesitated—"it's Peters. I'd forgotten. Hope it's nothing serious."

Mr. Heald smiled.

"Serious enough," he said. "He's still up yonder?"

"So far as I know," Sturdee answered.

"Well, he'll wait."

White men do not visit Kaveli every day, particularly in the rainy season. If Sturdee took a strong dislike to his visitor from the first moment, he was none the less hospitable.

"I've a spare bedroom," he said. "So you needn't worry pitching your tent. Come along up. There's air of sorts on the hillside and we can reckon the sun's down for all vital purposes."

When dinner was over the commissioner led Mr. Heald to the bungalow *stoep*, which looks over Kaveli, and is exposed to the languorous airs which steal down from the mountain at night. The two sank into Beira chairs. A native servant, smooth as a shadow, brought coffee and liqueurs. The commissioner reached out his cigar case.

"You're doing me darned well," said Mr. Heald. "One hardly expects this sort of thing—the back of beyond."

"Nor to find me dressing for dinner," said Sturdee. "Why not?" he added. "It's so easy to lose grip of things, you know, particularly of oneself. One must keep one's end up. Stores direct from home. The African lakes find me a poor customer. Mail every six weeks. D'ye know, you're the first white man I've seen since the rains began?"

He struck a match, lighted Heald's cigar, then his own.

"It's not a health-resort this, by Jove!" said Heald. "I don't envy you."

He had become a little more expansive under the influence of Sturdee's excellent claret. He sipped his liqueur luxuriously. For a moment there was silence; then:

"Can't say I envy *you*," said the commissioner. There was a perceptible uneasiness in his voice. "You've got an unpleasant job if you're going up the swamp. What do you want exactly? Can you tell me about him? He stayed here—I'm naturally interested."

"Of course," Heald answered. "We're both servants of the law, I reckon. It's an interesting yarn in a way. Quite interesting. If he's the man I want—and I don't mind telling you I'll be darned cross if he isn't—his real name's Stresmann, Dr. Felix Stresmann—a Yankee. He's wanted for murder."

"Murder?"

Sturdee had leaned forward in his chair.

"Murder? I can't believe it. Why the man's got the face of a —"

"And the thumb of his left hand's missing," Heald interrupted coolly. "That's a little more useful from a policeman's point of view. Never heard of Stresmann—that Durban affair? It's a while back now, though. Five years—the last year of the War. Didn't cause much fuss. We'd got a different conception of the value of human life then."

Heald drew steadily at his cigar.

"Stresmann was practising in Durban. Came across just before the War from one of the big American colleges. Wasn't a popular man socially. But professionally there was none to beat him. I knew him well myself. A mighty clever man. Did a lot of work among the natives; tropical and sub-tropical diseases his special line. Hot stuff on leprosy and rotten things like that. He practised chiefly to raise money for his experimental work. It was pretty expensive, as you can imagine.

"Well, Stresmann got married. Ever noticed how men of his class so often pick their women from—well, another class? She was out with a sixth-rate theatrical company; came out specially to get hold of something rich, if you ask me. A pretty girl—pretty—that just about sums up her stock-in-trade. She'd got him before he knew where he was. They were married within a month."

Again Heald paused. But Sturdee made no comment. He was watching the glowing end of Heald's cigar as if it hypnotised him.

"That was during the War," the policeman continued at last. "Second year. Stresmann, you'll remember was a Yankee. He'd already offered himself for service, though. In the middle of '15 they sent him up to German East. He did fine work up there. Discovered a new treatment for dysentery, among other things. But I believe some Dutchman bagged the credit for it. Stresmann had no time for kudos—

"Then he came back. Unexpectedly. Movements of ship secret and he wasn't allowed to wire. Walked into his home to find—well, you can guess. He shot 'em both. Least, we presume he did. The facts are he was seen to take a rickshaw from the docks to the High Street. After that he simply vanished. Cleanest get-away I've ever known. The house stands on the Berea in its own grounds. The servants had been given leave by Mrs. Stresmann.

"The evidence you'll see was chiefly circumstantial. There was no actual proof that he'd been in the house. They'd been shot with a .45 Colt. That was there. It belonged to Edwards, the dead man—a pretty awful bounder he was, by the way—but it wasn't his thumb print that was on it. No. I've got a photo of it in my pocket now."

For the first time the commissioner interrupted. He leaned forward in his seat. His voice was curiously tense.

"You're convinced that Peters is Stresmann?"

"Am I?"

Heald finished his liqueur.

"Well—yes; so far as theory goes. If your friend up there in the swamp will oblige me with an ink-press of his right thumb and it agrees with the photo of the thumb-press on the pistol—if it doesn't identify him straight away as Stresmann, you'll agree it will be sufficient evidence to justify the serving of the warrant."

A silence fell again. It was broken by the commissioner.

"Quite," he said. "But—my ——!—it does seem an awful thing to run a man down like this. I should hate it. A white man, too. I'm glad I'm not in your line of the law. From the very way you speak, you show that your sympathies are with the man you're hunting rather than with his victims. I'll bet Stresmann's worth a hundred of either of the people he killed."

"So he is undoubtedly," replied Heald. "But that's sentiment. A policeman's no time for sentiment. It wouldn't do."

The commissioner pointed to the whisky which a native servant had placed on the table.

"Say when."

"Thanks," said Heald. "No soda. I've a touch of fever or something. Feel quite shivery. I'd like to sweat it out tonight."

STURDEE poured out a peg himself and diluted it sparingly. He drank and then stared in gloomy silence at his guest. Three months ago he and the man who called himself Peters had sat like this after dinner. He could see him now, a frailly-built, scholarly-looking, middle-aged man, almost lost in the depths of Heald's armchair, his eyes pale and mild, sunk in blue-black rims beneath a broad, well moulded forehead; sparse beard hiding the chin and helping to impart to the whole face an unusual expression of benevolence. They had spent every evening of his fortnight's stay in the same manner—talking interminably. And almost always the topic had been Africa and the problems of its people in relation to Peters' own scientific work. But he was more than a scientist. His enthusiasm was almost religious in its fervour. He believed he was going to rid tropical Africa of one of its most deadly scourges. It was his one consuming ambition. He had made light of his disappointments, and of the hardships his work entailed. He was obviously ill himself. He was alarmed only because this might interfere with the continuance of his experiments.

A murderer—a fugitive from justice!

The commissioner sighed deeply.

"Then you have heard nothing between the murder and the information we sent you?"

Heald half-filled his glass with soda and washed down two tablets of quinine.

"Well, we've been on his trail ever since more or less. He got to England. Then to New York. You may have heard of Karl Brandt, the man who was made a big fuss of in '18, with his wonderful face surgery, patching up fellows who had been burned or disfigured in the war. Through Scotland Yard, we discovered Stresmann had visited him. They were old medical school friends, apparently. It's more than likely Brandt operated. But Brandt had been killed in a motor accident before this was found out. If Stresmann did have his appearance altered in any way, we've no clue to it, except that he didn't have his missing thumb worked up.

"A clever stunt that, if you like," Heald continued. "A man can have his whole face altered in a matter of months. I reckon his plan was to change his identity completely.

"But you see we were working on two things. First, the missing thumb, which you might call a broad identification mark; second, the keenness that he had for his job, tropical diseases. We reckoned that he'd make for the tropics sooner or later, and we were right, I think. Two years ago I had a report of a doctor working among the niggers in Northern Rhodesia. The general description—mind, we were expecting that his face was altered—tallied. But the man we sent up bungled the job and the doctor faded like smoke.

"Last Christmas the East African police wired that a chap answering roughly to the description had been heard of near Nyanza. The negroes were talking of a marvelous white doctor who could cure everything and every one—even raise the dead. The thumb of his left hand was missing—but so was he by the time that the police squad got on his trail. They found, however, that he'd cured several cases of sleeping sickness and leprosy, and that, quite naturally, he was very popular."

"Then apparently, since the murder, your man has done nothing but devote himself to the cause of medicine and humanity?" said Sturdee.

"Well, yes; and escaping from justice. I tell you he was keen on his work. They're still using his dysentery stuff. By the way, I've got some of it with me—they dish it out to you now—official ration. It put me right in no time at Fort Jackson. Wonderful stuff, puts chlorodyne in the shade."

The commissioner laughed with perhaps too obvious cynicism.

"Rather ironical, isn't it, that you should be hunting the life of the man who has probably saved yours?"

"A policeman's life is full of ironies," replied Heald, unshaken; "and as I said before, there's no time for sentiment in it. Why, if that chap was my own brother it would make no difference to me—and—duty."

"Ah, you make duty your God," said Sturdee.

"Duty should be the second God of every man."

"Then, what's Stresmann's, do you think? I mean what would you do if you were in his shoes? Would you give yourself up, knowing you would be hanged, and realizing your capacity to help the human race and alleviate human suffering?"

"If I'd done what he'd done—yes. I'd have stayed in that room till the police came and taken my chance. That was a man's duty."

"And indirectly caused the death of perhaps a thousand other people. Strictly speaking, it isn't logic, is it?"

"Logic be hanged!" the other replied with sudden heat. The line of argument was evidently not to his liking. "You're letting sentiment slip in again. If a man takes human life, his own is forfeit. That's the law of God and man, and that's enough for me. And—" the implication was plain—"it ought to be enough for any one else."

"Then, surely," pursued the commissioner, oblivious of the fact that his guest was angry, "surely, if you execute a man whose death means the death of many innocent people, you're guilty yourself?"

Heald's mouth tightened.

"Peters is a very great friend of yours, perhaps? You speak as though—I hope you don't think me rude—as though you were not over-keen to have him arrested."

The commissioner did not answer. He stared down at the sleeping, moonlit village of Kaveli and the lake, and to the perspiring swamp beyond, from which the night mist ascended in fantastic wreaths and ghostly spirals into the still, dank air. Fifty miles up there the man they were discussing had built his camp and makeshift laboratory; had deliberately chosen for himself a spot in the very germinating ovens of the diseases he was seeking the mastery of, sleeping sickness, bilhartzia, malaria, blackwater and a malign host of others.

Had he not already atoned? Surely the destruction of two palpably worthless lives was balanced by the saving of countless worthy ones? How many good fellows had died of blackwater fever alone? That was the disease which up till now had baffled all investigations. Peters, or Stresmann—did the name really matter?—had believed himself to be on the verge of finding an absolute antidote to it.

The law of God and man. What a travesty it was. Ah! if he had not sent that fatal information, Sturdee thought bitterly. It had not entered his head at the time that it was the police authorities who wished to have news of an American interested in tropical medicine, whose left thumb was missing. The request had come from the high commissioner. He had included the information in his monthly report almost without thinking. He had been fearfully busy at the time, had not even thought of sending a word to Peters himself. And now it was too late.

Heald got up and stood for a second with a hand pressed tightly to his brow.

"I say, I'm sorry, you know," he said. "I withdraw that last remark, of course."

"Thanks," answered the commissioner.

"He *is* a friend, in a way. I'm dashed sorry for him, naturally. Feeling rotten? I'd turn in; it's an awful journey up there, don't envy you a bit—hot as —— not a breath of wind." He clapped his hand for a servant. "Juma will make you comfortable. I'll go down at once and see about your guide and boatman. Will six suit for breakfast?"

"Yes, thanks. I'd like to get away before the sun."

The commissioner saw him to his room, bade him good-night, and then, stopping for a moment on the *stoep* to finish his whisky, walked swiftly down the narrow path through the village to the lakeside. He halted at the door of a fisherman's hut. A big negro, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, appeared.

"Is it thou, Amazi?"

"Yes, *bwana n'kubwa*."

"Listen well, then. There is work for thee. Thou knowest the great white doctor at Matumba's? Two hours before sunrise thou must leave for him. There is no letter, but thou shalt say thou hast come from Kaveli with a warning. Then shalt thou say, very clearly and slowly, thus: *Stresmanni*. Say it now."

The native repeated the word several times. He had the pronunciation almost perfect at last.

"Say no word of this, Amazi, to any man. On thy return thy female goat shall have given birth to twins and, by a miracle, they shall both grow up; big lusty ones that shall be indeed worth owning."

"It is well, *bwana n'kubwa*. No man shall know of my departure, and before the stars pale the swamp will hide me."

The commissioner went on to another hut where lived the guide whom he had promised to engage for Heald. Then he returned to the bungalow.

II

THE laboratory was a long grass hut, built in native fashion, with no other architectural ambition than to obscure the tropic sun by day and insect life by night. A broad wooden bench stretched the whole of one side of it, and seated at this was a white man with head bent intently over the eye-piece of a microscope. On his left side a neatly-arranged row of wool-plugged test tubes reflected the light of the petrol lamp by which he worked. On his left hand lay a notebook. Occasionally he raised his head and wrote rapidly in the notebook, as though reluctant to transfer his attention a moment longer than was necessary from what the instrument revealed to him.

Once he paused to consult another notebook, and as he read a look a triumph came into his eyes. He scribbled in a formula, returned to the microscope, carefully dropped a bead of oil on the slide and adjusted the high-power oil immersion. The fingers that worked the fine focussing screw began to tremble. He paused again, took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow. At that moment came the voice of a native servant standing without the bamboo door—

"*Bwana n'kubwa*, it is I, Ali."

The white man swung round in his chair. He answered sharply:

"What is it, Ali? Thou knowest my orders."

"*Bwana*, there is a man here from Kaveli. He has a message of great importance for thee. He says it is for thee alone."

"Bring him here, then."

The door was opened and Ali appeared, Amazi, smoking with sweat, behind him.

"Thou mayst go, Ali," said the white man, and to Amazi, "Come forward. What is thy business?"

The man answered readily.

"I have come, *bwana n'kubwa*, with a message of warning from Kaveli." He paused for a second, and then, in uncanny mimicry of the commissioner's voice, said, "*Stresmanni*."

The white man stood up.

"What dost thou mean? Explain!"

"Nay, great master, that is all; I may say no more than that: 'A message of *warning from Kaveli*.'"

The white man stared at him, and then came comprehension.

"There are white men, strangers, in Kaveli?"

"No, *bwana n'kubwa*, there is but one. A tall man with the eyes of a vulture. He came in a *dhow* from Fort Jackson in the afternoon of yesterday. Last night he slept with *Bwana* commissioner."

"And now, where is he now?"

"*Bawana*, I know not; but my brother told me he would embark at sunrise for Matumba's. There was a storm and much rain fell. I took shelter at M'pitu, at the house of Ali-bin-Nazar. They would have no shelter. It would mean delay. Perhaps they will arrive in the morning. I know not."

"Thou hast spoken well," said the white man slowly. "Bid Ali give thee food and blankets. Thy tongue will keep still?"

"*Kweli, kweli, bwana n'kubwa.*"

The native retired. The white man sat down. For a minute he remained quite still, staring at the door. Then he took a small silver box from the pocket of his shirt, opened it and extracted a glittering syringe, into the barrel of which he carefully measured a dose of morphia. A dab of iodine on the left forearm, and the vicious little needle was pressed home and the drug injected. A second passed, then calmly he replaced the instrument in its case and applied himself once more to the microscope.

III

LIKE a horrid pre-historic water monster, the big dugout nosed her way through the gap in the papyrus that led to the landing at Matumba's. The brief twilight was over. Fireflies gleamed among the dank, dripping reeds; the frogs were in full chorus. From the west came the low muttering of the storm that had just passed over and left the sky swept clean and bright with stars.

Gently the craft grounded on the mud. The crew of four jumped out and hauled her to the shore. Only then did the dark figure huddled up in the stern move. He stood up gingerly, as if uncertain of his balance. Two of the crew went to his assistance and helped him to the land.

"House—white man," he said, in halting Swahili.

"*Mazuri—mazuri Bwanaa n'kubwa—karibu,*" one of them answered, adding in English, "Near, near."

The laboratory was scarcely a hundred yards from the landing, but to Heald, fighting with his sickness, each step of the way was a weary mile. The natives supported him at each side. Even they had reached the limit of human endurance. The boat had been sunk in the storm that came on during the first afternoon of the voyage, in shallow water luckily. Their food, however, was lost. At the house of Ali-bin-Nazar, where Amazi had rested, they got but one poor meal. The white man had driven them on like a ——, made them *salve* the boat and proceed before the sun of the second day was up. Since then they had eaten nothing, and they had rowed and poled and dragged the boat continually.

One of the natives stumbled. Heald kicked him to his feet. But he quickly fell again, and the white man went on with only the one to help him. He was on the verge of a collapse when he reached the door. From the chinks in the bamboo came the glare of a lamp. Ali slipped out of the shadows, chattering excitedly.

"Speak English?" asked Heald gruffly.

"Yes, master, I speak. You want to see the *bwana doctor?* In there, *bwana,* wait and I will tell."

Ali moved to the door, but Heald pulled him back. Still supporting himself on the shoulder of the native, he opened the door himself; then, drawing his pistol from its holster, he spoke to the man who was advancing across the floor to meet him.

"Dr. Peters?" The man stopped abruptly at the sight of the pistol, but his face showed no surprize.

"That is my name—yes," he answered quickly. "You are—"

"Put—put your hands up—thanks—sorry, and all that—bit feeble—daren't take any risks—formalities—arrest you—Stresmann, that's your name? What—thumb—thumb-print—keep 'em up, —— you—left thumb, right thumb, fireflies, fireflies—Stresmann—Durban—keep, keep—fireflies, —— them, fireflies everywhere—." The pistol dropped to the floor. Heald swayed, reeled drunkenly, and collapsed in a heap at the feet of the man he had crossed one-half of a continent to arrest.

Immediately the doctor was bending over him, a hand on his wrist.

"Bring help, Ali," he ordered quietly. "Quick."

Ali returned with two negroes. They lifted the man to the laboratory bench, and the doctor, emotionless as a machine, proceeded to make a diagnosis. He put a thermometer under Heald's armpit and bade Ali press the arm firm so that it would not slip, at the same time ordering his second personal servant to fetch blankets, a pillow, hot water. Then he bared the abdomen and tenderly felt the spleen. He read the thermometer and with a sterilized needle obtained a blood film from the lobe of the ear, dried it over a spirit lamp and placed it in a solution.

The servant came back. Two whisky bottles were filled with hot water and put at the sick man's feet. His head was lifted, and the pillow, evidently the doctor's own, slipped underneath. Then the blankets were tucked in snugly round him.

"Good. That is all, Ali," said Peters when this was done. "The *bwana* is very sick. I shall need thee later perhaps. See that there is hot water in abundance, and the men of the *bwana's* party, give them hospitality."

The natives went out, and as the door closed behind them, Peters bent over his patient smiling, as he did so.

"Heald, oh, don't I know you, Detective Heald, in spite of your terribly undisciplined, unshaven chin? You'd have a man dismissed from the service for that, wouldn't you? Poor old fellow, blackwater. Just as well you're not conscious, you know. It really is most painful to be alive when you're nearly dead. What a chance, what a chance."

He hummed softly to himself as he walked across the laboratory to a small copper oven under which a spirit lamp burned dully. He opened the door and took out two test tubes, held them up to the light and eyed them critically. Then he removed the plug of one and inserted a platinum wire loop, which he vigorously scraped about inside.

He moved to his seat at the bench where he had been working when Heald came.

At the end of half an hour he got up and went over to the patient, felt his pulse, took his temperature again and shouted to Ali to bring more hot water. The bottles were changed quickly and Ali retired. The doctor returned to his bench and held up to the light a tube containing a blood-red fluid. He chuckled audibly as he poured it into the barrel of a large hypodermic syringe. Then he pulled down the blankets and painted a large brown patch of iodine on Heald's right thigh and firmly thrust the needle in. Slowly the plunger was depressed until the last drop of the fluid had disappeared; the instrument was withdrawn and a tiny dab of lint placed on the puncture and the blankets tucked in once more.

Peters wiped the perspiration from his own brow. Very carefully he sterilized the syringe and laid it aside; then he sat down, pulled the notebook toward him, picked up the pen and began to write.

IV

THE man on the bed opened his eyes, blinked and tried to comprehend, which is not a very easy thing to do for one who for three days has groped his way through the mists that hang so thick and low in the valley of death.

The room seemed in some way familiar. Last night, when for a brief space the mist had lifted, he remembered that bench and the shining bottles and a man with—yes—a man with a beard. A kind, genial sort of fellow. What was his name? Somehow or other he felt that he knew, that he must know it. Why should it be hard to think—?

"Hello, hello, still sleepy?"

Heald blinked again and saw the man with the beard bending over him.

"Just drink this," he said, slipping a hand under his shoulders and putting a glass to his lips. "Fine—now you'll feel better—potent stuff, eh?"

He laughed as Heald's eyes opened wide.

"Better? Now your mind can work, can't it? Remember me, Heald?"

"Yes—yes, I do now, certainly." He spoke quite rationally, but with obvious effort. "Before, things were slipping—couldn't get a grip. Jove! that's wonderful stuff. Fainted, did I?— Well, looks as though you've won. You're a clever man, Stresmann. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to talk to you, Heald," the doctor replied, pulling up a chair. "You've got to keep quiet, understand? You've had blackwater pretty badly. Wouldn't disturb you now if—if it wasn't necessary. How do you feel? Mind quite clear?"

"Quite," answered Heald dryly. "I suppose you understand why I came?"

The doctor laughed.

"Yes—naturally. Besides, I examined your papers. The photograph was particularly interesting. I must congratulate you on several things. Of course, I am Stresmann and I did kill my wife and young Edwards. I was going to thrash him. The fool pulled out a pistol. My wife—that was accidental—after that I was mad—"

"You'll put that down in writing?" Heald cried hoarsely.

"It won't be necessary," the other replied. "I hope you will not consider it a personal slight when I say that I found it fairly simple to avoid arrest. I had my life's ambition to fulfill before that happened. I was working then on malaria and blackwater fever. I have been working on those diseases chiefly ever since—with three serious and annoying breaks caused by your perspicacity. When I found it necessary to leave Uganda last year, I was on the verge of a discovery. I was unable to take up the threads again till I found the Piti-Piti Swamp. I believed that I could remain undisturbed for six months. I underestimated your ability by one week—but—but, *I have won!*

Dr. Stresmann got up and walked across to the bench, returning with a tube of blood-red fluid held lightly between the finger and thumb of his right hand. He spoke with an almost childish air of swagger.

"I have won—and you, Heald, shall be the first white witness to my victory. Here—here in this little bottle is my life—my life's ambition. Here is the substance, the serum that—that"—his voice began to shake and he controlled himself with difficulty— "Listen, the climax to my experiments came two weeks ago. I have sought all these years for a certain cure for malaria and its murderous complication, blackwater. I will not bore you with details. I believed this substance to be that cure. I tried it first on a native. Normally he would have died in two hours. This morning I saw him jump into his dugout and set off for M'pitu, twenty miles away. I have cured twelve cases of malignant malaria and five of blackwater since then.

But the black man was not enough for my tests. I despaired of finding a white without running certain risks, which you will guess. I was obliged, therefore, to produce the condition of blackwater in myself. I knew enough of its nature to do this. Already I was infected with malaria. Seven days ago the disease made itself manifest, and I carried out the operation successfully. I am now, as you can see, free of it.

"It was strange that you should arrive—like that," Stresmann continued. "At first I was dumfounded, for I was at work on my monograph describing the discovery. It was important that the world should not lose that. Yet it was splendid, really. A second white man cured of blackwater! I gave you the injection. Yesterday morning you passed the climax. Last night you were conscious. Now you are cured, and I—I have completed my paper. I have worked continuously—three days—three nights. I am tired—now."

The light went out of his eyes suddenly, his head dropped, but once more he pulled himself together.

"I must be quick now. The injection that you see here is a powerful poison. Within eight days it is necessary to give a second injection, an anti-toxin—otherwise the first is fatal. I am going to give you that now."

A look of apprehension came into the policeman's face. He tried to get up.

"Look here, Stresmann, no hanky-panky. I'm quite fit—reckon I'll do without that."

But the doctor did not answer. From a shelf above the bench he took down a green phial, almost empty. He poured the last two drops into the larger hypodermic syringe and filled it up with distilled water. Then he clapped his hands.

"Bring in Amani," he said to Ali, who came running in. "I am sorry, Heald,"—turning once more to the bedside. "I understand your fears, but this is absolutely necessary. If you won't keep still I must ask my servants to hold you. I must not risk losing a single drop. *I—I have no more.*"

The natives came in and without ceremony they pinned the now struggling man to the bed. The injection was made, like the first, in the deep thigh muscles. Heald was exhausted, but still conscious. The doctor spoke quickly:

"Heald, Heald, listen—a matter of vital importance. You are cured. In a few days you'll be as strong as ever you were. You'll go back. I want you to do something. There on the bench is my monograph. I have placed other papers with it. They must go to the proper medical authorities. I told you I took the injection—eight days ago—my stock of anti-toxin is exhausted. The last dose—*you had*. I am feeling weak now. My boys will look after you—do you understand—I give you charge of—papers."

Heald turned his head.

"Stresmann," he said, "you're either a devil or the best man I ever met. I shall know soon," he added grimly. "If I live—I'll—Stresmann—Stresmann—what—"

Dr. Stresmann did not answer. His head had fallen on his chest, his hands dropped listlessly at either side of the chair; the whole body rolled over sidewise and fell to the floor.

He was dead.

IKEY KATZ—COWBOY

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Norman Springer

Author of "The Great Dugano," "The Spanish Tornado."

THE business engineer from back East held the floor against all comers. He discoursed upon every subject under the sun—and "I". Chiefly I. We were all fed up, and helpless. The fat man from Chicago gently snored in his chair; the bronzed, youngish man in blue serge, who was, we had learned, a master mariner on his way to San Pedro to take command of a ship, had long since frankly turned his back upon the oracle. He sat gazing out of the window at the flat, dreary desert which was flashing past the train. The rest of us just sat and suffered.

Somehow, the business engineer got upon the subject of pride. How or why I don't recall; but I am sure no one suggested the subject to him. I suppose he just worked through his repertory until he came to the P's, and there he was. Anyway, we became gradually aware he was talking about pride—and I.

"Pride pays!" declaimed the gentleman. "Why, one of the best assets I have is my pride, and I'm not ashamed to say it's had a lot to do with my success. Why, I'm continually being called in by some of the biggest men in this country—as maybe I mentioned before—who want me to show them how to run their business. The very first thing I do is make 'em understand that I'm just as good as they are, and maybe better. That's how much pride I got. I'm a plain man, and no frills, but when a man's got family it's only right he should let people know it.

"My grandfather was one of the biggest coal and wood dealers in New England, in his day, and my mother's people were *Mayflower*, and she's often said that if the Pettibones had their rights they'd be lords of the manor. That's my family, and I'm proud of it, and what I've always maintained is that it doesn't hurt a man's standing none to let his clients know who he is, especially with all these foreigners and Jews in business. Makes 'em look up to you if you got a proper pride."

The sailor leaned back from the window and heaved a sigh that seemed to have a subdued chuckle in it. The business engineer had paused for breath, so we all heard the sigh, and the muttered words that absent-mindedly followed.

"When pride meets pride," said he.

No more than that, but so eager were we for succor that the eyes of the group immediately fastened upon the man in blue. Even the fat man opened his eyes and said "Huh?" hopefully.

The sailor looked embarrassed.

"Thinking aloud," said he. "This country—wild West, you know—" he indicated the flitting scenery—"and our friend's remarks about pride—family pride—the two together reminded me of a lad I once knew."

He chuckled openly this time.

"A cowboy," he said.

The business engineer pounced upon the word.

"Cowboy!" he cried scornfully. "No such animal. Lot of dudes in hairy pants prancing in front of a camera in Hollywood—that's your wild West! Why I bet there hasn't been a real cowboy in this country in twenty-five years!"

"Strange; it's exactly twenty-five years since I knew my cowboy," was the sailor's smooth interruption. It warmed our hearts to witness how coolly and easily he took the stage away from the pest. "And he certainly was a real cowboy, in his heart, anyway, with the hairy pants you mentioned, and shooting irons, and lariat—'me larry-at' Ikey always said—and the bold free spirit of the wild West on his tongue. Pride, also—family pride, same as the mate. As proud a cowboy as ever went to sea, I fancy."

The B. E. cleared his throat.

"Yes, the old-time cowboy—" he began.

"Aw—you were saying, Cap—about your friend—" said the tobacco salesman pleadingly.

"Yes, I was saying—" said the sailor.

I

I WAS saying that Ikey Katz was a cowboy of parts, though I don't think he had ever sat a horse in his life, and, at that time anyway, I'm quite sure his closest acquaintance with cows was opening condensed-milk cans. All the same he was a cowboy, though the mate called him other names.

I knew him one voyage in my first ship. That was the old full-rigged ship *Commodore Watson*. My uncle, Andrew Stark, was her master at the time, and I was being schooled in her beneath his eye. No bed of roses mine. I was rated as ordinary seaman and did the work of one on deck; but I berthed aft, where Uncle Andy could keep his eye upon me.

We loaded in New York for San Francisco; it was in September, 1900, and the day we battened down hatches and dropped down to the Staten Island anchorage I was fifteen years old. Just the age to appreciate a cowboy.

Shortly after dark the boarding-master with whom my uncle did business in that port came alongside with our crew. That crimp's name was "Duckfoot" O'Brien. He was supposed to have webbed feet, but I can't swear he had, because I never saw them out of his boots. I can swear that he was as scurvy a knave as ever operated a sailor's boarding-house, and his crews were usually hopeless.

But when Duckfoot had shooed, pried and hoisted his drunken dupes aboard it developed that, for once in a time, he was giving good measure for his money. There were seventeen men in the lot and a full dozen and more of them were sailors, unmistakably sailors. Duckfoot had induced this able-looking lot to desert a lately arrived German bark, with promises of higher wages and better food in the *Commodore Watson*, which was true enough, and of easy times, which was decidedly not true.

A prize lot for the times. In those last days of the sailing ship there were not enough sailors to go around, and a Cape Horner, especially a notorious work-house like the *Commodore Watson*, usually had to go to sea with a bare half-dozen experienced men in the focsle; the rest would be unskilled riffraff, waterside flotsam.

Our first mate, Mr. Peter "King" O'Brien was delighted with the prospect of sweating up a halfway decent crew. But he wouldn't let on to Duckfoot that he was pleased. Indeed, no. Our Mr. O'Brien hated Duckfoot O'Brien like poison, because of the name the latter bore and disgraced. A proud man was our Mr. O'Brien. Proud of his family name. Tradition had it that Duckfoot O'Brien's cock-billed nose was due to an urging from our Mr. O'Brien that he mend his ways or change his name.

So now the mate spat contemptuously over the rail and said to Duckfoot:

"Bah! Sweepings! I never clapped eyes on a worse lot!"

"There ain't been an American bottom left port this year with as good a crowd," flared Duckfoot. "Most of them's shellbacks, mister."

"Yah! Dutchmen and squareheads!" jeered the mate. "And you are a man shy. For ——'s sake, give me one Irishman, anyway."

Duckfoot muttered something beneath his breath and gave Mr. O'Brien as sour a look as he could command—and that was sour enough, you may be sure. I saw the mate puff out his cheeks; a habit of his when very pleased about anything. Oh, it was beer and skittles to Mr. O'Brien to be able to show in any way his scorn and contempt of the other O'Brien. For he was a very proud man.

But suddenly Duckfoot O'Brien began a curious wheezing snicker, which was his way of laughing. Mr. O'Brien stopped puffing out his cheeks.

"All right, mister, I'll get you your man," says Duckfoot. "Not a regular Mick, mister, but sort of related to one. Related to an O'Brien, mister. D'ye think he'll suit?"

"If you go palming off any coon on me named O'Brien—" began Mr. O'Brien.

"Sure, ye know me better than that, mister," exclaimed Duckfoot, in a shocked voice. "Why, I'm an O'Brien meself."

The mate winced at that; he couldn't deny it.

"This is a nice bright young feller I have in mind," continued Duckfoot, but speaking now directly to my uncle, the captain, who had hitherto taken no part in the wrangle. The crew, thought my uncle, was the mate's business. "But," said Duckfoot, "I can't promise he'll turn out to be a prime able seaman like all the crowd I've given you."

"Don't expect him to," said my uncle. He was eager to get the crimp away before he and the mate worked up a real scrap, as they had done before. "I don't care who or what he is," said my uncle. "But eighteen is my minimum. So over the side with you, O'Brien, and go dust him up, and, halt, blind or corpse, deliver him aboard here before the tug comes for us in the morning."

Duckfoot accordingly departed. It was, I guess, about two o'clock in the morning when he returned, this time in a skiff and with one passenger. I was standing the anchor watch with the sailmaker. While Sails answered the crimp's hail, I sped into the cabin and awakened Mr. O'Brien, as he had ordered. The mate wanted to have a last word with Duckfoot; and I think too that he was wondering just what sort of blow at his well known pride the crimp was planning to strike. His pride was a very serious thing to Mr. O'Brien.

"Here, bub, will you listen to this?" Sails hailed me in a stage whisper as I returned on deck.

I joined him at the rail. He had dropped the Jacob's ladder over the side, and down in the skiff a discussion was going on as to who would first mount it.

"Up with you; I'll hold it steady," came the wheedling voice of Duckfoot O'Brien.

"G'wan; t'ink it I wuz born yesterday," responded Duckfoot's companion. It was a shrill voice, such as you can hear by the hundred thousand on the East Side of Manhattan; just now it was a bit thickened with liquor. Its accent and dialect are beyond me; I can only approximate them. "T'ink I'm goin' foist and let you skip it wit' me grip? You go foist."

"Sure now, ye know I wouldn't do no thing like that," says Duckfoot. "I'm your friend, that's what I am. Here's the bottle; have another little nip before you go up. Why, this is the ship I told you about, what I had such a hard time gettin' the captain to let you come, and he wouldn't 'a' done so only the mate is a nice feller name of O'Brien just like me, just like Moe, and he says he'll take you on because he's my friend. Have another drink. Why, this ship is goin' to the wild West, s'help me she is. Just where you want to go. To 'Frisco, that's where she's goin' and you couldn't ask for any wilder West than that."

"Dat's all right," replied the other with drunken stubbornness, "but I ain't goin' to give you no chanst to duck wit' me grip. After me payin' ten dollars to dat ham I should give you a chanst? You go foist and I hand it up to youse."

The mate had reached the deck by now and was leaning over the rail.

"What's that ballyhoo about down there?" he sings out. "Can't you put a bum aboard, Duckfoot, without raising the dead?"

"G'wan, y' big stiff, who youse talkin' to?" was the breath-taking answer from the cautious one below.

Mr. O'Brien sucked in his breath quickly, and I began to be sorry for that new hand before ever he set foot on deck. It doesn't do to reply in that tone to a proud man like Peter O'Brien. Meanwhile, Sails dropped the end of the main brace into the skiff.

"Bend this on to the beggar's gear," says Sails, "and we'll get that much of him aboard, anyway."

It took Duckfoot hardly more than a second to comply.

"Haul away!" he cried.

I tailed on to the line with Sails and we gave a great yank, because from the amount of fuss we expected a heavy weight would test our muscles, a well filled sea-chest at least. We went staggering backward, and over the rail came flying a small square parcel that bounced upon the deck with a light thud.

"Holy dago, so that's his gear!" swore Sails.

It was; and almost instantly its owner was on deck to claim it. He didn't clamber over the rail; he fell over and landed flat on the deck, and said, "Oy! I hoit me knee!" and gathered to his bosom this treasure he had feared to trust Duckfoot with. It was a small straw telescope basket, tied shut with two little straps, with a connecting handle between.

Fancy a man coming aboard with that outfit for a Cape Horn voyage in a square-rigger. For that was all his dunnage, every bit of it; no bag, no bed, no blankets, unless they were squeezed within the narrow confines of the receptacle.

"Well, here's a real hard case," says Sails. "Going yachting around the Stiff all standing, he is!"

The fellow scrambled to his feet, still exclaiming in a loud voice that he had "hoit" his knee. By the mate's command I held up the deck lantern so that its light plainly showed him.

"My ——, what's this?" said the mate.

"Just what you asked for, mister," responded Duckfoot O'Brien's voice. Duckfoot's head and shoulders were above the rail; but he didn't come aboard, he stayed on the ladder. "Can talk a Christian lingo, mister," says he. "That is, pretty near. Y'ought to get on well, you too, bein' related."

"Eh?" said Mr. O'Brien.

He swung on the new man, and without looking to see I knew his fist was doubled.

"What's your name, you?" he snapped.

"Me? Ikey Katz. Say, bo, I hoit me knee—"

"That's Mr. O'Brien, Ikey," came from Duckfoot. "He'll be like a brother to you when you tell him about the champ. Just like I been, Ikey. All brothers together, bein' O'Briens, Ikey."

"Sure," said Ikey Katz. "Say, bo, we're brudders, ain't it? For me brudder's name is O'Prien, too. Kink O'Prien, dat's me brudder, and he's—"

That was as far as Ikey Katz got with his family relationships. Mr. O'Brien's doubled fist caressed his jaw, not gently, and Mr. Katz's shoulder blades caressed the deck—not gently.

I heard that wheezing snicker which was Duckfoot O'Brien's mirth. My glance, which moved no faster than Mr. O'Brien's body, disclosed a bare rail. Duckfoot had ducked.

His voice floated up from the water.

"Hey, there, King O'Brien!— Sure, I hope you treat your brother decent this voyage, ye bob-tailed Mick!"

Mr. O'Brien snatched a belaying pin out of the rail and hurled it into the darkness in the direction of the voice and oar strokes. A yelped curse informed that his aim was good. Mr. O'Brien then leaned over the rail and followed up his lucky throw with as blistering language as ever scorched my youthful ears.

Sails and I did not interrupt that frenzy, you may be sure. Who were we to come between a proud man and his pride? In awed silence we picked up the slumbering Ikey Katz, telescope basket, derby hat and all, and carried him for'ard to the empty bunk in the focsle.

II

NOW, that first mate of ours was a proud man on any count whatever, proud of his seamanship and the way he kept up his ship, proud of his strength and his fighting reputation—very proud of that—proud of his looks, which he set off with the finest of broadcloths when he swaggered ashore. But the core and heart, the very living soul, as it were, of Mr. O'Brien's vast pride was the fact that he was an O'Brien.

An O'Brien? He was *the* O'Brien. The salt of the earth was Clan O'Brien, and he was the saltiest of the lot. He was a Boston Irishman—which gave point to Duckfoot's jibe of "bob-tailed Mick"—but he swore by the ancient glories of Erin. Time was when O'Brien was king of the green island; if he but had his simple rights *the* O'Brien would be king there today.

He would talk about it. Indeed, the

glories of Clan O'Brien and the rightful position of the O'Brien—to wit, himself—was the one subject upon which the mate would discourse at length, especially when liquoring up ashore with his cronies. This talkative pride earned him the nick-name of "king"; as "King" O'Brien he was known throughout the whole merchant service. He accepted and cherished that sobriquet—'twas no more than his due!

But at times his kingly pride would be sorely affronted by contact with unworthy bearers of the royal name. Duckfoot, for instance. Then bitter and long-lived would be the King's anger. To disgrace the name of O'Brien—that was the unforgivable sin. Duckfoot was no true, Simon pure O'Brien, avowed the mate, and he avowed it to Duckfoot's very face whenever the two met. Nor did the blood flow in the veins of any of the unsavory specimens of O'Brien-hood who were frequently and slyly thrust into his attention by his friends and acquaintances. For years it had been a recurring prank on the San Francisco and New York waterfronts to persuade an innocent and tattered bum to approach King O'Brien and claim the common name. The result was always pleasant excitement for the onlookers, and—well, excitement for the bum.

On one occasion these jokers overreached themselves. They sent a negro named O'Brien—so he said—into the royal presence, in Brady's barroom in Oregon street. But they crowded too closely for safety upon the heels of their dupe, and when the dust settled again five of them—including the unfortunate darky—were assisted to the Harbor Emergency Hospital, and Brady's joint had to close its doors and be reassembled. Next morning Mr. O'Brien paid the damages and told the judge—named Sullivan—he was proud to suffer for the honor of his name.

Now you get the point of Duckfoot O'Brien's little joke. Mr. O'Brien, of course, got it right away. Insult! A ghetto-bred guttersnipe dumped aboard and told to call him—*the* O'Brien—brother! *Lèse-majesté* of the rankest sort. In Mr. O'Brien's catalogue of humanity Ikey Katz and his kind were left out. Used as I was to Mr. O'Brien's ways, I felt very sorry for poor Ikey.

But for several days my pity, I must admit, was sadly adulterated with mirth. Ikey was truly a sight to behold on a sailing ship's deck. He was a specimen, said the third mate; indeed, "that specimen" was the only name Job Pennyman gave Ikey during the whole voyage. Even the dumb Dutchmen in the focsle laughed at him and his miseries.

He turned to at dawn with a limp and a swollen jaw and the clothes in which he came on board. They deserve a word, those clothes; the raiment of a Hester Street dude of that day. The shallow dicer was pressed down upon his ears, the suit, of gaudy stripes, was hugely padded on the shoulders and skin tight on the legs, a nearly white collar, three inches high at least, encircled his neck, and a gorgeous purple tie billowed above the V of his vest. Such was Ikey that first morning; a fancy sailorman if ever was one.

Even my uncle, who ordinarily never saw the crew, spied that brilliant object as he stood chatting with the pilot.

"For heaven's sake, what's that morning glory doing down there?" demanded he of the second mate.

"Member of the crew, Captain," sang out Mr. Bates in an unnecessarily loud voice. Oh, he relished the chance to prick the famous pride. "Says he is a brother of King O'Brien, sir!"

Mr. O'Brien overheard, as Mr. Bates intended. Overheard, too, the ribald laughter of my uncle and the pilot. If there existed any ghost of a chance that poor Ikey's goose would not be well cooked in the *Commodore Watson*, that ghost of a chance departed right then and there.

For several days he was a very limp Ikey. The first open water to slide along our keel brought sea-sickness to him—and he was sick, oh, very sick. Vocally sick, too; his knee "hoit," his jaw "hoit," his back "hoit," and he feared his innards were coming adrift. His plaints resounded along the decks. Then suddenly they were missed, and it was discovered that Ikey had betaken himself and his ills to the seclusion of his bare-boarded bunk. Without by your leave, mind you.

Informing Ikey that a foremast hand in the *Commodore Watson* didn't take to his bed in broad daylight simply because he "hoit" inside and out was a job that the third mate was more than competent to handle. Such little jobs were his specialty. But despite his preoccupation with the hurrah's nest of sailing day, Mr. O'Brien found a moment to spare. Ikey was his meat. He waved old Job back, and himself stepped into the focsle to interview the invalid. Almost instantly Ikey reappeared on deck with Mr. O'Brien's boot at the base of his spine.

"Hey, what t'—— y't'ink it youse doin', you big cheese!" yelled Ikey as he painfully picked himself up from the deck. "I tell youse me brudder's Kink O'Prien, de lightweight—"

Right into King O'Brien's face he flung that—and after the lesson he had received the night before! Of course, the inevitable happened. When the mate had finished walking on him, I again helped to pick him up and deposit him unconscious in his bunk. The second time in a dozen hours, and for the same offense; and I had seen the mate's face as he walked aft and I knew the end was not yet. Yes, I felt very sorry for Ikey Katz, and was very much amazed by him.

It was my surprize as much as my sympathy that impelled me to serve poor Ikey, I think. My itching dislike of the mate had something to do with it, too; Mr. O'Brien had more than once dusted my jacket with a rope's end, and I felt that lending aid and sympathy to Ikey was getting back at him. I begged and stole salves and liniments from the steward's supply and smuggled them into the focsle to Ikey in the nighttime during our watches below. For he, like myself, was in the port watch—in fact, O'Brien picked him first at the watch-choosing on the evening of sailing day.

"I'll take that bird laying up in the focsle, and see what I can make of him," said Mr. O'Brien on that occasion.

* * *

IT WAS the ship's good luck, but Ikey Katz's bad luck, that most of his shipmates were good sailormen. They turned out fully as smart as they had promised, and in consequence the mates had little excuse to rough them. Of course they worked in a way they never dreamed of working in their own country ships.

There was no daytime watch below in the *Commodore Watson*. "Work 'em up!" was my uncle's gospel, and the only commandment he ever laid upon the mate as regarded the crew. But if the *Commodore Watson* was a work-house, she was not a hellship, and the mates did not beat up men who knew their work and did it. That is, not too often. Just enough dressing down to keep them smart and in their place.

But Ikey didn't know his work and couldn't do it, and the mate had plenty of time to devote to him, and, according to his code, ample excuse for lifting hand and foot in the interests of Ikey's education—and this quite apart from the private grudge he undoubtedly had against the fellow, for neither my uncle nor Mr. Bates forgot to remind him at frequent intervals of "me brudder, Kink O'Prien."

Ikey had a very hard time of it, indeed, while he learned to come running when called by whatever sulphurous name the mate fancied to shout—and it was never O'Brien you may be sure—and to keep out of better men's way when a job was in doing. It became a habit with the mate to hit Ikey nearly every time he came within arm's length of the poor wretch.

The first time I slipped for'ard to console Ikey with medicines and counsel—this was after we had been at sea nearly a week—I expected to find a limp and abject fellow who wailed his wrongs while he licked his hurts, and who, very likely, would beseech me to carry aft a plea for mercy. I had before this played good samaritan in the focsle, and had come to expect of greenhorns who had experienced a few days of Mr. O'Brien's discipline a talkative self-pity with a whine in it.

But never a whine for help from Ikey. Oh, he was talkative enough, heaven knows; that focsle was clamorous with his miseries. No sullen endurance for Ikey, at least among his own kind; he wanted his mates to realize what a raw deal he was getting. He wanted them to realize that he intended doing something about it. Can you imagine it? That poor, runty Jew boy, crippled and bruised and entirely sea-ignorant, lying on the bare boards of his bedless bunk and informing all who came within ten feet of the focsle door just what he was going to do to the mate—as soon as he, Ikey, got over feeling sick and could stand up without his knee "hoiting" him.

"I'll sock dat big stiff so hard he'll t'ink it wuz old John L. what landed on him! I'll loin him he should be Kink O'Prien! Him! De big stiff!" This while I rubbed Quaker State Liniment for Man and Beast on his swollen knee. "Me brudder, Moe, *he's* Kink O'Prien, de lightweight champ of New Yoik City, and champ of de whole woild some day. Dat's me brudder. An' here dis big stiff goes an' swipes it his monicker."

More in this tenor, much more, "me brudder" this, and "dat big stiff" that. Just as the mate never referred to Ikey in printable terms, so Ikey never referred to the mate as other than "dat big stiff." As he talked I learned to my amazement that Ikey was just as incensed at the mate being King O'Brien, as the latter was at the little Jew's bold claim of relationship to the royal name.

"I'll loin dat big stiff to swipe it me brudder's monicker!" said Ikey. It was a refrain.

I scoffed. His threats were of course ridiculous; I told him they were, even as I poured some Quaker State into the gash on the top of his skull. His head was as round as a bullet, and as hard to the touch. I told him to clap a stopper on his tongue because that kind of talk was dangerous. If the mate overheard it he'd make Ikey dance to a livelier tune than had yet been played. As for Ikey standing up to the mate, as he hinted—why, the mate was a big man, and a famous bucko.

"Me brudder—" began Ikey, and I gave his head an extra dose of liniment. "Oy!" cried he. "Say, kid, is dat carbolic youse puttin' on my dome?" He groaned and writhed for a moment. Then, as though gashed heads and smarting liniment had no existence, he remarked pleasantly, "The bigger dey are the harder dey fall—dat's me motto."

He meant it. That was the amazing thing about it. It wasn't empty talk; I quickly realized that fact. This squat little Yiddish vagabond actually intended to stand up to King O'Brien, and confidently expected to give that famous bucko a thrashing. The very idea was so preposterous it took all the wind out of my sails for a time.

In the first place, there were the physical disparities which made the idea preposterous. The first mate was a big man, as hard as nails, and stripping, as he often boasted, "to 175 pounds of hot——, by ——"! While Ikey Katz may not have been a lightweight like his beloved brother, he was surely no more than a welter; and he was a landlubber.

On board a Cape Horn windjammer in that day a landlubber was a too common pest, and he was regarded by sailors and officers alike as the very lowliest of all created creatures. He was a cur to be kicked, a worm to be trod upon; most emphatically he was not a man in the way that a seasoned and skilled shellback was regarded as a man.

Yet here was a lubber, an awful lubber, who actually didn't know stem from stern about a ship, clamoring an intent from which the hardiest shellback who ever fought his way to the cockship of a focsle would have recoiled in unfeigned horror. This runty little Jew whom I, a boy, overtopped by half a head really planned to put up his dukes to King O'Brien!

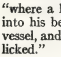
When I could talk, I sat down on Big Fritz's sea-chest, and, summoning all of my powers of invective and ridicule, told that chesty little Hebrew how many different kinds of fool he was, and what would happen to him in that ship if he didn't change his tack. I told him that his intention to fight the mate was stark insanity—no matter who his brother was; for the mate would murder him, and, I said, it would be very bad luck for the ship to have a man—even a lubber—go over the side in a canvas jacket so early in the voyage.

"G'wan; I ain't afraid of the big stiff!" says Ikey.

I told him that even if he should miraculously give the mate a tussle, there would be Bates standing by with his knuckles to give O'Brien a hand if he needed one, and old Pennyman in the offing with an iron belaying pin ready. I laid it on thick. If he licked all three, says I, there would still be my uncle, the captain, with his six-shooter, and the steward and the tradesmen to reckon with.

"This isn't an old-time hellship," says I, "where a hand can lick a mate and move into his berth. My uncle runs an orderly vessel, and he wouldn't allow his mate to be licked."

"*Ja;* iss so," Big Fritz agreed with my every statement. "You fide; you dey shood —*boom!*—dead-O."



IKEY swallowed it, every word. He didn't resent either my manner or my speech; indeed, I learned later that sarcasm and ridicule ran off him like rain off a gull. His was a most literal mind. Also, to my pleasure, he straightway accepted me as friend and ally. I was strangely drawn to that absurd lubber.

I think it must have been because we were two boys in a shipful of men. Ikey was twenty-two or three, yet he was a boy, an ingenuous, gullible boy in most things, with a boy's dreams and aspirations. Of the two, I was certainly the elder.

Ikey stared up at me with bright and solemn eyes. He had remarkable eyes; they were small and black like two big shoe buttons, and the light in them was a curious combination of cunning and stupidity. His prominent nose had been flattened at the bridge, which gave his features a startling resemblance to those of a poll-parrot. Forehead and chin sloped the same way; and his ears, which were large and disproportionate in size, stuck out from his round head like a pair of stun's'ls. Yes, as old Job said, Ikey was a specimen.

"Oy! Dey're a tough gang, ain't it—dem guys?" quoth Ikey when I finished telling what would happen when he tried to knock the block off'n dat big stiff.

"You fide; get shooded; das iss goot-py," confirmed Big Fritz.

"G'wan; guess I can practise it too wit' me shootin' irons and show dem guys dey should get gay," said Ikey. This was just boy talk, of course; I understood that. "If I go after dose stiffs wit' me trusty six-guns, what they t'ink then, huh?"

I was more than willing to enter into the spirit of the pretend game; it wasn't often I had a chance to be frankly boyish without losing face.

"Why, you'd get plugged 'fore ever you got abaft the mainmast," scoffed I. "O'Brien's a dead shot, and quick on the draw." I didn't know whether he was or not, but I liked the phrase. "He's a bearcat on the trigger," says I.

A baffled expression was visible in Ikey's face.

"Dat lets me out for now," he admitted, with a grudging admiration in his voice. "I got to practise. I ain't had it no time to get kvick yet, but you just wait, kiddo, an' I'll show dem guys. I'll fix dat big stiff!"

I thought he needed another lecture on the proper behavior of a lubber on the high seas, so I read him one—with Big Fritz's booming approval. This time I dwelt upon the illegality of his ambitions.

"You're not on shore now, where you can call a policeman if you get into trouble," says I. "You're on a ship at sea, and the afterguard can do whatever it pleases and make you say you like it. That's the law. Why, if the Old Man wanted to he could hang you from the main yard-arm, and for doing nothing at all!"

I really believed this last, so great was my awe of my uncle; and my manifest conviction convinced Ikey.

"The captain backs up the mates in whatever they do," I informed him. "So whenever you get a cuff or a kick you just say, 'Aye, aye, sir,' and be glad it isn't worse. Why, even a real sailorman, like Fritz, does that."

"*Ja*, iss so," said Big Fritz.

"Can't a guy get even or nuttin'?" was the rebellious query.

More boy talk. I instinctively recognized it as such, and knew what was behind it. Ikey needed to save his face—like any other boy confronted with authority.

"Not on the ship," I told him. "But when we make port; that's different. Once you set foot ashore you can do whatever you want, and the captain can't say or do anything. I tell you—that's what you do; just as soon as the mate sets foot on the dock you go for him, and then no one will interfere. Isn't that right, Fritz?"

"Iss so," confirmed the Dutchman.

"In the meantime," I added, "lay off talking out loud about King O'Brien. That's the mate's name, and he's awful proud of it."

"Dat's me brudder's name," was the instant retort from Ikey. "Dat big stiff swiped it. Me brudder's the lightweight—"

And so on. Not only the mate was proud of a name and willing to talk about its glories. "Kink O'Prien" was the very sun of this little lubber's existence. For an hour he poured forth his vast pride in "me brudder," fascinating tales to my half-comprehending ears, tales all redounding greatly to "me brudder's" pugilistic prowess, tales of ring battles, street battles, gang differences, barroom affrays, and the "Kink" did this, and the "Kink" did that, and proved himself a fancy man indeed, and the rough, tough "Kink" of the Bowery, which, in that day was still a street for hard cases only.

Listening, I realized that Ikey would not —nay, could not—stop talking about "me brudder." I felt more and more sorry for him, even as I listened with pleasure to his yarns, for I thought of the trouble his brotherly pride would continue to bring upon his devoted bullet head. There couldn't be two kings glorified in one ship.

III

NOT that visit, or the next, did I learn why Ikey was come to sea. That, during many weeks of the voyage, was his cherished secret, though I gathered it had something to do with the "vild Vest." The phrase, "de range" was often on his lips when we talked together, and an hour's communion in the second dog-watch quickly became our habit. But Ikey could be secretive about his own self, if not about "me brudder," and it was weeks before I—as well as all hands—discovered the reason why he had shipped in the *Commodore Watson*.

Long before then I knew he had a secret. I shrewdly suspected that the explanation of the secret was contained within the telescope basket which had so surprizingly preceded him aboard. Ikey used that basket as a pillow, and apparently had not opened it since coming into the ship. The sailors, of course, paid no attention to his hints and allusions, but I was delightfully mystified.

"When I open me grip you'll be surprized," said Ikey.

I don't mind saying I was surprized—with everybody else.

The mysterious receptacle did not hold clothes, I first assumed, because Ikey wore day in and day out the glad raiment in which he came aboard. A sorry mess his clothes were before the first week was out—for Mr. O'Brien saw to it that Ikey didn't get clean or easy jobs. The gaudy suit shrank with repeated wettings until even Ikey's short bowed legs were too long, and worse disaster threatened with every movement of his body.

His coat did split down the back one day when he was pulling at the braces; and the sleeves of that garment drew up on his unusually long arms until they ended just below his elbows. But he continued to wear it, and the abbreviated and contracted trousers; wore, too, the choker collar which each watch became blacker, and the derby hat, which, from buffets and accidents, soon threatened to divorce crown from rim.

"From Dude to Scarecrow in Seven Days" about describes Ikey's sartorial decay.

"That's no way to treat go-ashore clothes," I remonstrated with him, with, I admit, a double motive; first, I was curious about the contents of the mysterious grip, and second, with the growth of intimacy I was developing a natural passion for improving Ikey.

Even if he were an awful lubber, I didn't want him to look so much like one. He was my lubber.

"Haven't you any other clothes?" I asked.

"I should worry me about dese rags," he retorted, with a scornful glance at the ruins of his dude-hood.

"What will you go ashore in when we reach Frisco?" I demanded. "You got another shore suit in that basket?"

Ikey lowered his voice to a dark whisper.

"Say, kid," he hissed in my ear, "vait till I put 'em on in the vild Vest. I knock it out your eye."

From which I gathered that Ikey did have clothes in the telescope basket. But he volunteered no particulars about them; he let me know he would disclose his secret in his own good time. Most mysterious he was about it, and most curious was I. He even hinted that I, his friend and well-wisher, might have a peek into the magic basket sometime when no one else was about. He'd think about it. Meanwhile, he'd think about my advice to visit the slop-chest on Saturday night, for, he admitted, the nights were a little chilly without blankets.

It was a duty imposed upon me by my uncle to keep the slop-chest accounts. I don't mean that I actually ran the store and dished out the slops. That was the steward's traditional duty, and Old Adam, the majestic and venerable darky who held that office, would have felt badly indeed had he been relieved of this responsibility. But Old Adam was woefully weak with figures, so the bookkeeping part of the business fell to my lot.

Perhaps I'd better explain the old windjammer institution of the slop-chest. It was a shop, you know, a sort of general clothing and comfort store, and sailing ships were required by law to maintain it for the benefit of the crew. In this store a sailor could purchase clothing and sea-boots and blankets and tobacco, and, in fact, almost anything he might need for his comfort and well-being on a long voyage.

The sailor desiring slops came aft after supper on Saturday night when the chest was open; his purchases were checked against his name, and when he was paid off, the value—or, at least, the selling price—of the purchased articles were deducted from his pay. The law provided that the chest's profits should not exceed ten per cent.; but I seldom heard of the law being observed. Slops were a captain's perquisite, usually, and he laid on all the tariff the traffic would bear. My uncle was a staunch churchman, and gave generously to foreign missions when he was at home; but at sea he took his hundreds of per cent. on rotten slops and thought there was no wrong in it.

Since I was occupying the spare stateroom, the slops in the *Commodore Watson* were always laid out on the cabin table. I sat at the table with pen and ink and account book; Old Adam, the patches of white wool in the shape of mutton chops which adorned his dusky cheeks twitching importantly while he waited on the custom, bustled about the heaped stores, extracting here and there and calling out the items to me.

A severe and dignified man was Old Adam. His piety, and the ability he had of selling high-priced slops to sailors who didn't want the articles and had not come aft expecting to buy them, placed him high in my uncle's favor.

This night we were crowded for space, for a generous half of the table was occupied by the chess game being enjoyed by my uncle and the mate. Of course we could not ask them to move, and since the game dragged interminably Old Adam and I piled most of our stock on the floor and I sent the hail forward that the chest was open.

Ikey Katz was the first man aft. I think he ran.

Now, attending the slop-chest was a ceremony, a rite. A man came aft on tiptoes, so to speak. He entered the sacred precincts of the cabin. He took off his cap and fiddled it in his hands; he shuffled his feet and spoke his requests in hushed whispers—"pound o' 'baccy, an' two pair o' socks, an' one o' them check shirts." Asking the price of an article, or disputing it—such a thing was unheard of. Old Adam was supposed to call out the price to me, and sometimes he did, but the sailor seldom heard it for just then all his abashed faculties would be engaged in an endeavor to get safely out of the dread environment before the steward pressed a pea-jacket or some other expensive and unwanted article upon him. He seldom succeeded.

* * *

THIS night was different. It was Old Adam's Waterloo. As he confided to me later, he had never been so insulted in his life.

For Ikey Katz came to buy, but also to bargain; and he had his bargain manners with him. A store was a store to Ikey, whether on the high seas or on T'oid Avenue.

He came not in abashed and lumbering quiet; he strode in jauntily and noisily. He didn't fiddle his hat in his hands; he kept it on his head—or tried to. He surveyed our goods with a critical and contemptuous eye.

"What you want, boy?" demanded the steward.

"Vat you got?" said Ikey.

That was a poser for Old Adam. Nobody had ever asked him that before, you see. Moreover, Ikey's "Vat you got?" was by no means the quiet and respectful murmur that should come from focsle mouth; it was an aggressive and disrespectful bark. It took Old Adam aback. His mutton chops quivered just as though he had missed stays.

Worse followed. Ikey spied a heap of pea-jackets on the floor, all neatly folded and reposing on a square of wrapping paper. He actually stirred them with his boot.

"How rotten dey are," commented he. "Vat dey wort'?"

Old Adam drew a shuddering breath, and his glare would have transfixed any other man from forward. It didn't bother Ikey in the least. And, since business was business after all, and the garment in question, worth three dollars, sold for ten, Old Adam demeaned himself to the extent of picking the top one off the pile and tossing it into Ikey's arms.

"Chawge a pea!" he called to me.

Ikey promptly tossed the coat back to the steward. "Youse got it a t'ink commin', old Viskers!" Whiskers! To Old Adam's very face! "I should buy a rotten coat vat you von't tell it how much! A coat I got." So he had; even if it were in tatters. "Hey, Viskers, how much?"

He had reached the blankets and was feeling one with disdainful fingers.

Old Adam moistened his lips with his tongue and opened his mouth and shut it again without speaking. I could see he was simply flabbergasted by this strangest of customers, this unsailorly scarecrow who jibed at him and wanted prices and talked down his stock to his very face. A Portagee pirate with gold hoops in his ears, a South Sea cannibal with a human jaw-bone dangling upon his breast, an Eskimo clad in grease and furs—any one of these could have visited Old Adam's slop-chest and he would not have quivered a mutton-chop. But Ikey was something new, something altogether beyond Old Adam's experience in foremast hands. Old Adam simply didn't know how to take Ikey.

So he actually answered Ikey's query as to the price of the blanket, and without saying "Chawge" to me in the same breath.

"Blanket—three-fifty," says he.

Ikey snatched his hand away from the blanket and wrung his fingers as though they were scorched.

"T'ree fif-ty!" His exclamation was an agonized wail in an ascending scale, and so shrill and loud was it that the thing I had been dreading happened. The absorption of the chess-players was dispelled by the dolorous howl; they looked up from their game and became conscious of Ikey's presence in the cabin.

"Hello! Here's your relative, mister!" remarked my uncle cruelly. He was losing the game, and so permitted himself this dig at the famous pride. "Nice manners he's got in a man's cabin."

Mr. O'Brien reddened with anger; and since it was out of the question that he should make a suitable retort to the captain, he took it out on Ikey.

"Hey, you guttersweep, take off your hat in here!" he snarled.

Ikey jumped, and, automatically it seemed, his hands went up and his hat came off and down. Aye, already Ikey's muscles were trained to instantly obey the behests of that voice.

"Oy, oy, sir!" said Ikey, which was as near as he ever came to properly pronouncing the customary "Aye, aye."

"Hump!" said Mr. O'Brien.

"Check with my bishop," said the captain.

"Uumm," said Mr. O'Brien, and the two heads again bent over the board, and Old Adam was left without succor.

I thought that having been warned, as it were, and having drawn upon himself the attention of the lord and lieutenant of this kingdom in which he was the lowliest subject, the awful lubber would have sense enough to keep his mouth shut and take what Old Adam was pleased to give him. But I didn't know Ikey very well then. He had come aft to buy, and with him buying meant bargaining; it couldn't penetrate to his mind that the business of buying and selling could ever be consummated in another fashion.

Indeed, as I came gradually to learn, Ikey's skull was capable of containing very few ideas, but those few were fixed ideas. Once an idea did squeeze into his head, nothing short of dynamite could get it out again. Persuasion, ridicule, beatings—he accepted them all quite indifferently and did as before.

"T'ree fif-ty!" he reiterated. "Dat's a fun, ain't it? T'ree fif-ty! You mean for a half dozen, hey, Viskers?"

"A piece," said Old Adam, shortly. "Stop your jaw, and take them and git. What you want—two? George, chawge—"

The steward might overawe the A. B.'s, and even the junior mates, with that brusk manner. But not Ikey.

"At dat price I don't vant it a blanket," he declared. "I should be such a rummy. Why, looky here, Viskers, I can get me dis very same blanket in Klopstock's on T'oid Avenue for one foity-nine, s' 'elp me, an' maybe less because young Abe Klopstock wins it a nice wad de time me brudder, Kink O'Prien, licks de Irish Terrier—"

"Urrgh!" growled Mr. O'Brien; and that bear-like growl informed me that he was not so far sunk in the game but that he was cognizant of Ikey's fresh misuse of the sacred name.

"You got my bishop," growled my uncle, and he too looked up.

I tried my best to catch that awful lubber's eye and warn him to pipe down. Quite useless; he stared me blandly in the face, completely ignoring my winks and grimaces, and continued his dangerous gab. He had come aft to bargain, and bargain he would, despite —— and high water.

"T'ree fifty for dat piece of rag?" he snorted scornfully. "My—vat a robber." Suddenly he changed his manner, and wheedled the astounded steward. "Looky here, Viskers, you should cheat it a poor boy like I am wit' t'ree-fifty for a rotten blanket. Two dollars I give. Huh? G'wan, Viskers, loosen up. I bet you dese rags didn't cost you more'n a dollar. Two dollars, Viskers. Take it or leave it!" And by that time Ikey actually had a pair of blankets under his arm, and his manner indicated that as far as he was concerned the matter was settled. "T'ree fifty for dese blankets," said Ikey, "is like blackjackin' a baby."

"Urrgh!" growled my uncle; and his bear-like growl informed me that he, too, had his mind no longer on the chess-men.

"The lad doesn't seem to like your prices, sir," remarked Mr. O'Brien to my uncle. Actually, there was a purr in his voice. Oh, but it tickled him to be able to pay back the captain with his own coin, so to speak. "Seems to think they're too high, sir."

My uncle reddened with anger and pushed back his chair. And since he couldn't very well curse the mate for such a respectfully spoken observation, he rounded on poor Ikey and cursed him up and down and athwartships.

Ikey was simply petrified with surprize and awed fear. He just stood and took that verbal dressing-down. He didn't offer to talk back; and silence in Ikey was a most significant fact at any time. My talks to him, and the sailors' remarks, about the majesty and unlimited powers of the captain of the ship had somehow soaked into his mind; that the captain was never to be crossed or flouted had become one of his fixed ideas.

He never developed any tithe of this reverence for the mate, or for any one else. But he did respect my uncle, much as a more limber-minded and imaginative man might respect his king, or his God.

He stood and gaped while my uncle cursed his eyes, blasted his soul and consigned his whole being to Davy Jones' deepest locker; he opened his arms and the hardly bargained for blankets fell to the floor; and when my uncle roared, "Get out of my cabin, you misbred so-and-so; and if I catch you aft here again I'll keelhaul you, by ——!" Ikey promptly got.

What a difference from his entrance. He left on tiptoes, his hat in his hand, his shoulders hunched to receive the expected blow. Nor did he ever come aft again to slop-chest; not during the entire passage.

He found his tongue when he got forward. He complained bitterly to his mates, I was told, about the "doity deal" he had received. Characteristically, he blamed "dat big stiff" for his discomfiture. It was already a habit with him to blame O'Brien for all ills. Another fixed idea. Not a word of complaint against the Old Man, then, or afterwards; the captain was beyond censure.

BUT it was the thought of the Old Man bearded in his own slop-chest that tickled the fancies, and even aroused the sheer admiration, of Ikey's shipmates. What—this worst lubber in five oceans calling the Old Man of the *Commodore Watson* a robber—what else?—to his own ears, and getting away for'ard alive, yes, even unmarked! That was almost more than the focsle could believe.

Even the confirming testimony of "Boer" Charley—who had been awaiting his turn at the slops in the alleyway while Ikey bargained—was insufficient to convince them. They wanted my confirmation, and when I said yes, it was even as Ikey said, their opinion of their lubberly mate visibly sky-rocketed. From that hour the focsle began to hold Ikey in affection and respect. For he had done something no one of them dared do.

"It wuz dat big stiff what got me in wrong," raged Ikey to me. "Didn't I have de shine backed down, an' me makin' it a buy, and den dat big stiff butts in an' queers me wit' his Nibs? You just wait, kid, an' you'll see me land on dat big stiff!"

"Don't worry about having no blanket," I told him. "I'll sneak one of mine for'ard to you, and it will do you until we get Down Under and the cold begins. By that time the Old Man will have forgotten about you, most likely, and you can call for slops again. But for heaven's sake, don't act like you did this time!"

I tried to explain to him just what a terrible breach of sea custom he had been guilty of. But it was no use.

"I should pay dat shine vat he asks, the dirty robber," says he.

He didn't know even then that it was my uncle's store, and not Old Adam's, although the focsle had been agog with the matter. Until I carefully explained it, he had not seen any connection between the captain's anger and his demeanor as a customer; I'm not sure he saw the connection even after I explained it. "Dat big stiff" was the guilty party in Ikey's mind.

"I should worry about dat old sloppy chest," says he. "Last night I got it a hunch, an' I made me these."

He drew out of his pocket two little cubes of whittled wood—dice, I saw, upon closer inspection.

"I should buy it dere sloppies when I got a good graft wit' dese," he said, scornfully. "Looky, kid, vat I got already."

He reached into the dark recesses of his bunk—this was on Sunday afternoon, and we two were alone in that side of the focsle—and held up the largest knitted guernsey I had ever clapped eyes upon. It could belong to only one man in that crew—Big Fritz, whose bodily proportions were truly gigantic.

"Where did you get that?" I cried. I thought my peculiar friend had committed the unforgivable focsle sin of stealing from his shipmates. "Better put it back before he misses it," I warned. "Why, you fool, they'll skin you alive."

"Vat you mean put it back?" declared Ikey, indignantly. "I won it dis sweater—dese t'ings, too."

In succession he held up a shirt, and underclothing, and a fine leather belt that I had seen holding up the pants of a squarehead named Ole.

"It's a pipe, kiddo," confided Ikey. "Dese boids never seen craps played, an' when I show it how they goes dippy about it. I should spend my money wit' dat coon when I can t'row me a natural an' take de shoit off dese dummies' back."

He rattled the dice together in his hand and rolled them out upon the smooth surface of Big Fritz's sea-chest, with a dramatic exclamation and a snap of fingers that was like a pistol shot.

I was interested, and filled, I admit, with a feeling of admiration for my awful lubber. Ikey was a "specimen" on a ship, true enough, but he knew so many things I didn't know. I didn't know anything about the game of craps. The great Afro-American game was unknown in sailing ships; at least, I had never heard of it being played in a focsle before. I gathered it was just as new—and fascinating—to the rest of the crew. Ikey introduced the game, and, as he described it, cleaned up.

After awhile Ikey handed me back my new jack-knife and silver watch which I had eagerly risked against Ole's brass-studded belt.

"I should take it the eye teeth out of my frien'," said Ikey. "Listen, kid, I play wit' dese dummies; they don't know no better."

"But you won them," I objected. "It might have been me that won."

Ikey looked at me queerly.

"Yes, it might," says he. "Say, listen, I *made* it dese dice. See?"

I said yes. But I didn't see. It was years before I saw.

The ensuing week witnessed a new Ikey—sartorially speaking—blossom forth. The tattered Hester Street suit disappeared, and Ikey's form commenced to be arrayed in the most surprizing and ill-matched miscellany the combined bags and chests of the focsle could produce. He soon had a bed, a pair of warm woolen blankets and a genuine hair mattress which was donated, via the craps route, by Frederick Wilheim Augustus Schultz. I remember the name, because next slops night I entered it in my book against the items "pair blkts, 2 yds. ticking."

That poor Dutchy had to sleep for the rest of that voyage on a mattress of shavings, and shiver off the Horn under slop-chest shoddy. But Frederick Wilheim Agustus wasn't depressed or vengeful. Indeed, he was devoted to the game, and made further donations to Ikey's wardrobe. He didn't "see," either. None of them did.

Ye gods, but Ikey in his seagoing rig was a sight for the sore eyes of Father Neptune. To see him turning out for a chilly night watch with Big Fritz's guernsey enwrapping him like a great sack from neck almost to ankles, belted about with Ole's fancy belt, his feet encased in Boer Charley's fine pilot boots, out of which he threatened to step at every stride—it was Ikey's misfortune that his shipmates were nearly all larger men than he—and with this goulash of a costume crowned with his own original shallow crowned derby hat, beneath which his ears stood out like wings—to see such an Ikey, I say, was to see the eternal type from which the cartoonist draws all his variable caricatures. An unconscious clown. A comical grin ever upon his wide, loose-lipped mouth—except when Mr. O'Brien crossed his range of vision. Then he looked grim in an equally comical way.

FOR while Ikey climbed higher in the estimation and affection of his shipmates, he also descended lower in the estimation and disaffection of the mate. I, who heard all the chit-chat of the cabin, as well as that of the focsle, knew how bitterly the King's pride smarted, knew how expertly and maliciously my uncle and the second mate rubbed salt brine into the hurt.

I don't think it ever occurred to either of those two jokers that their barbed wit inevitably reacted upon poor Ikey. If it had occurred to them, I don't think they would have cared; what was he anyway but an awful lubber who needed a boot ever at his seat for the elevation of his soul.

So not a day passed that those two worthies did not refer in some manner, usually in a not at all refined manner, to Ikey's claim of kinship to the king of the O'Brien's—in which claim they affected unreservedly to believe.

And not a day passed in which Mr. O'Brien did not, with inward rage and outward indifference, pass on the sting of the remarks to Ikey. I am sure that Mr. O'Brien never for a moment wondered about the identity of Ikey's "Kink O'Prien." I am sure he just took it for granted that Ikey's "me brudder" was himself; that the whole business was a piece of colossal impudence fathered by his enemy Duckfoot O'Brien, and persisted in by this imposible little gutter-snipe out of pure spite. If indeed he troubled to think this much about the matter.

Mr. O'Brien was not by nature a reflective man; and in matters which touched his pride he merely felt and acted. If my uncle and the second mate knew who Ikey's "kink" was—and I think Bates knew—they kept the knowledge to themselves; and no one else aboard had the temerity to broach the subject to the mate.

I am quite sure that Mr. O'Brien to the very last, when the worst happened, had no inkling that this world contained two separate and distinct kings of O'Brien. It was foreign to his nature to even imagine such a thing.

He swore he would make a sailor out of Ikey, or a monkey. Heaven knows, he didn't make him a sailor. He couldn't. No one could. Ikey not only didn't know stem from stern; he didn't want to know. The ship to him was merely a ferry boat taking him to his cherished and lusted for wild West. A kindlier mate than O'Brien would have attempted to haze the indifference out of him.

Gradually, of course, Ikey learned which rope to pull on and which yard to head for when yelled at; but beyond that—well, Ikey was a monkey. One knot he learned, and quickly, and that was a running bowline. For a time it was a mystery how this knot came to be tied in the free ends of the smaller running gear forward; then one night when Ikey was on lookout—supposedly—he was discovered down by the foremast amusing himself by lassoing belaying pins with the end of the t'gallant sheet. He had thrown the line completely off the pin and was serenely unconscious of the fact that the huge thrashing and flapping of the sail overhead had something to do with his little game. But he was informed. Aye, Ikey got a good dressing down that night.

This is what he said about it:

"Just practisin' wit' me larry-at, an' he runs up and lands on me wit' bot' feet. Dat guy's got it in for me for nuttin' at all. Just wait till dis boat gets to land—I'll fix it dat big stiff!"

IV

THIS incident convinced Ikey he had better leave the running gear alone, except when authority ordered him to handle it. But it didn't cure him of practising. Indeed, as time wore on, practising with his larry-at became a positive mania with him. His magic dice obtained from the sailmaker a few fathoms of light rope which he could call his very own, and he lost precious sleep to acquire an uncanny skill in dropping the loop of his lasso about distant objects.

It was, he confided to me, vitally necessary that he perfect himself in the art; he would need this skill out there in the wild West where the cows ran wild and the cowboys wilder. I heartily agreed. It was great fun for me, a lone boy in an adult and work-a-day world, and I played the elusive cow by the hour around the fore decks in the second dog-watch.

He didn't stop with the lasso. There were other wild Western arts in which he needed practise. I think, too, that my rash brag—which I had long since forgotten—about the quickness of Mr. O'Brien's "draw" stuck in Ikey's mind and worried him, and decided him to do something about it.

My uncle, being a member of a very strict sect, and a pillar of the church at home, was compelled much against his nature to observe the Sabbath in his ship. There was no work save necessary working of ship in the *Commodore Watson* on Sundays. I know my uncle suffered afresh each week at the thought of a focsle full of sailors lazying away precious hours, but his conscience commanded him. Sunday was the Lord's day. If the lost wretches forward insisted on spending the holy day in games and sleep and other sins, so much the worse for them. He'd take it out of them on week-days—and he did. He spent his Sundays studying his Bible. The deuce of it was he made me do the same.

So it happened I was not present when Ikey decided to improve his draw, and there was no one handy by to warn him of consequences, for he scorned the advice of the Dutchman. I was sitting at the cabin table with the tale of the Egyptian Captivity opened before me, and I was wondering if the streets of New York and the cow countries of the wild West were really as entrancing as Ikey Katz declared, and should I leave the sea for one or the other.

Near-by, in his armchair, my uncle sat bolt upright and read his Bible. Other days he slouched comfortably in his seat; but not on Sunday. The mate had withdrawn to his room, for he was of a different faith and had learned to keep out of my uncle's sight on this day in order to avoid fruitless religious argument.

Overhead, Mr. Bates' carpet slippers pattered his progress to and fro on the poop; other days the second mate walked his watch in loud and heavy boots, but not on Sunday. The third mate, as it turned out unluckily for poor Ikey, was away forward yarning with the carpenter.

Such was the Sabbath calm of the *Commodore Watson's* cabin any fair weather Sunday afternoon. Quiet like the tomb.

Bang!

Just that abruptly was our Sabbath quiet shattered. And by a shot. It might have been my uncle who received the shot from the jump he gave. The second mate's voice bellowed through the open skylight, "Trouble for'ard, Captain!" and an instant later I heard the thud as he cleared the poop ladder at a bound and landed in his carpet slippers on the hard main deck.

The mate's door slammed open, and Mr. O'Brien appeared in his stockinged feet, holding up his unbelted trousers with one hand and endeavoring to withdraw his hastily snatched up pistol from its leather sheath with the other. Old Adam stepped out of the pantry and brandished a carving knife.

Such was the instant effect of that loud and sinister sound upon the inmates of the cabin. I might even say that the explosion shook us all to our several foundations. It was such an unexpected, undreamed of noise. In that ship! Shots were not supposed to be fired in the *Commodore Watson* on Sunday afternoon. Or on any afternoon.

My uncle bragged he had never been compelled to use firearms on a crew in his life, even to overawe; work, and a trio of husky mates kept discipline. As for any member of the foremast crew using firearms in his ship for any purpose whatsoever, or even possessing such deadly playthings—why, that was simply unheard of. There was a law against it, and my uncle, as he often said, was a law-abiding man, and ran a law-abiding ship.

Mr. O'Brien reached the deck first, with my uncle close behind. I was close behind him. I don't know what we expected to see, but I'm sure it wasn't what we did see.

What we saw was Ikey Katz coming aft rapidly, the while squirming and expostulating in the iron and angry clutches of the old third mate. Scruff of the neck and slack of the breeks was old Job's hold upon his victim, and he shook and bounced Ikey with every step. Behind him stalked Mr. Bates with a most peculiar expression in his face; and behind him trailed most of the hands. The procession came to a halt when old Job bounced his captive in front of my uncle and transferred his grip to one of Ikey's waving arms.

"This—this specimen!" says old Job.

He spoke through his clenched teeth. There was a blue-black mark, I noticed on one jaw, and the stem of his pipe, his well-beloved clay pipe, jutted from between his lips—the bowl was gone.

"What's this?" exclaimed my uncle. "That shot—what—"

"This specimen," reiterated the third mate, "tries to blow my head off, Captain."

"G'wan, I wuz just practisin' and you sneaks up an' grabs it me arm—" cried Ikey.

"Shut up!" commanded my uncle. And Ikey actually shut up; the captain was the one man who could seal his lips.

"Now what happened?" said my uncle. "And where's the gun?"

Silently, Mr. Bates held it out. It was a murderous-looking weapon, a long barrelled, blue steel, heavy caliber revolver; one of the pocket cannons popular with bad men in the year 1875, and with authors ever since. A real, Simon-pure six-gun of the older vintage, with, Ikey later confessed to me, a row of notches filed in the barrel in anticipation of sanguinary deeds as yet undone. A mercy he did not blow his own head off handling it.

"I was having a word with Chips," says old Job, "when I sees this specimen step out of the focsle and up on to the forehatch, sir, and all the crowd follering him, sir, and knowing him to be a—a specimen, sir, why I steps for'ard to see what he's up to—and there he is pulling this here gun out of his belt, sir, and aimin' it at the foremast, and all the squareheads standing about and admirin'. So I grabbed him, Captain, and, blast me if the swab didn't pull the trigger and blow the end clear off my pipe!"

Old Job held up the stem of the pipe and there was real misery in his voice.

"Best pipe I ever had," says he. "Curing it these ten years past."

"Well, I'll be—" said my uncle. But he did not finish, for it was Sunday. "What d'ye mean by it, you—you—"

If ever my uncle suffered under the inhibitions of the Sabbath it was at that moment.

"I ain't doin' it nuttin'!" wailed Ikey. "Just practisin' me draw, and dis old rummy—ow!" For the disgruntled third mate at that moment twisted the arm he held in fierce grip.

"That will do, mister," commanded my uncle. Even discipline must be administered soberly on Sunday. "Where did you get this weapon?"

He held the revolver gingerly before Ikey's eyes.

"Out of me grip," promptly answered Ikey. "I—I—"

Ikey was abashed and frightened—the only time I ever saw him display either emotion. The dreaded captain was accusing him. He realized he was in a bad fix; but what had not yet filtered through his thick, round skull was why.

"Well, go on!" snapped my uncle. "Who put you up to this, hey?"

"Dat big stiff!" said Ikey, rolling his eyes at Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien gasped; so did my uncle.

"De kid tells me all about his being a bear-cat on de trigger," continued Ikey. They all looked at me; I looked away. "And him pickin' on me always an' pretendin' me brudder ain't Kink O'Prien—" Mr. O'Brien gasped again, and even took a step forward; but the spell of Sunday was strong upon him—"so I t'inks it I'll practise me draw an' get quick on de trigger, too, seein' I'll need to be out dere; so I takes it one of me six-guns an' goes out—"

"One!" echoed my uncle. "My ——, have you got more of these?"

"Sure; I'm a two gun guy, an'—"

"Where's the other one?" roared my uncle.

Ikey shrank before that blast. As he talked he had been recovering his customary assurance of manner; but my uncle's voice told him he was in a worse fix than ever.

"In me grip; de other one," he quavered. "Aw, say, Chief, y'ain't takin' them to keep?" Chief, to the captain! But then in Ikey's eyes the captain was the chief—of police. "I vouldn't hoit nobody on dis boat," says he. "Not even dat big stiff what swiped me brudder's—"

"Let me take him in hand, Captain," suggested Mr. O'Brien, breathing heavily.

"Hump!" said my uncle, doubtfully. "No, mister, this is not the day—er, Mr. Bates, will you get this grip he mentions?"

"Aw, Chief, I need it dem t'ings when I get in de vild Vest," cried Ikey.

"Shut up!" roared my uncle. Immediately he added, "Why you—you Port Mahon baboon, you!—d'ye know what I can do to you for this?"

"Sure," says Ikey. "Youse can hang it me up in de main yard for nuttin' at all. De kid tells me all about you."

They all looked at me again. I looked away again.

"Well I'll be—" said my uncle.

I shivered. I didn't like his tone.

"Here, mister, set it down here, and let's have a look," added my uncle to Mr. Bates, who had just come aft carrying Ikey's straw telescope basket. "Is that what the beggar calls his grip?"

"Yes, Captain; and here it is," said the second mate.

HE LIFTED the top off the basket. Reposing on top of the contents, like an egg in a nest, was the mate to the wicked weapon my uncle held in his hand. Mr. Bates handed it up; my uncle took it, regarded both weapons with an expression of extreme disfavor, and tossed them over the rail into the sea.

"Aw, Chief—" began Ikey. But a look silenced him.

Mr. Bates held up another article for inspection. It glittered in the sunlight; it was like a wave of flame arising from the basket.

"Why—why—what, in heaven's name—" said the Old Man.

"Them's me cheps," said Ikey sullenly; and yet with a pride in his voice.

The article was a pair of cowboy's pants or leggings, of the more flamboyant kind. Flamboyant! Why, the goat hairs—I suppose they were—that billowed down the fronts of the legs were dyed a bright orange color.

"My good—" said my uncle, and caught himself up in time.

Mr. Bates held up another article of apparel, a flannel shirt of blood-red hue, with a gaudy purple silk handkerchief flowing from its breast pocket.

"M'son, did you run away from a circus?" demanded my uncle.

"Aw, Chief, dat's me outfit," said Ikey. "I paid it money to a ham actor for dem t'ings to wear in the vild Vest, an' Chief, please you ain't goin' to t'row it dem overboard? Oy! Vat I do wit'out me outfit? Please, you ain't goin' to t'row it dem avay?" This in a most piteous and ascending scale.

"Well, I'll be eternally—er, blessed," said my uncle. He stared at the raiment, and he stared at Ikey. I don't think he had been so surprized about anything in a dozen years. "D'ye mean to say you'd *wear* those things?" he demanded.

"Sure, dem's vild Vest clothes, an' when I leave the boat out dere I put dem on so dey know it I ain't no greeney," says Ikey. "An', please, you ain't keep it dem an' t'row dem overboard like me six-guns vat I pay me good money to a ham actor—"

"Here's something else," said Mr. Bates. He held up a long bladed knife with a wooden handle. A wicked looking instrument.

"Me bowie knife," said Ikey, "vat I keep in me boot on de range."

"Hump," said my uncle, and the bowie knife followed the artillery to a watery grave. Ikey oy-ed bitterly.

"What else?" said my uncle.

"Literature," answered Mr. Bates, turning the basket upside down and shaking the balance of its contents upon the deck at my uncle's feet. These contents consisted of books, scores of books—forty-seven, I discovered later when I read them all, and wished there were thrice the number—all flat, and thin, and with very gaudy paper covers. "Wild West Weekly, 5c" was the large lettered legend above the picture on the cover of each one.

My uncle stared down at them, stirred them with his foot, and then shifted his regard to Ikey.

"I don't think this rat is an escaped criminal, or an actor, or a lunatic either," he said thoughtfully. "He's a—a—"

"Specimen," said Mr. Pennyman savagely, looking at the stem of his pipe.

"—a fool, maybe," finished my uncle, "though he doesn't look like one. But he's no innocent runaway boy, that's certain. Not with that mug; not at his age." My uncle—none of them—could look into Ikey's battered, street-wise face and see what my youthful eyes saw, the uncorrupted boyish soul of him. My uncle had to take Ikey at face value, and at that value he was a runty, hard-faced New York tough.

"Look here, you, what d'ye mean bringing pistols and a dirk aboard my ship?" His tone chilled my blood as well as Ikey's.

"I didn't go for to do no wrong," wailed Ikey.

"What did you mean to do with them, start a mutiny in my ship," roared my uncle.

"Oy! I didn't go to do nuttin' wit' dem, Chief," cried Ikey, with unmistakeable earnestness. "Dey all come together, Chief, wit' the outfit what I buy me for ten dollars from dat ham actor what's busted in de place where I voik, an' Duckfoot says to me if I vants to be a cowpoy in de vild Vest he knows it a boat vat the mate of will be a brudder to me, like Moe, bein' the same name, see, and it's goin' straight to the vild Vest, but—" this with growing indignation—"dat big stiff he ain't done nuttin' but pick on me, an' he swiped it me brudder's monicker—Kink O'Prien, dat's me brudder, Chief—an' I don't go for to shoot nobody, but wuz just practisin' it me draw so when I get to de vild Vest dey ain't t'inkin' me vat dey say it a tenderfeet, an' he comes an' grabs me arm—"

"Oh, shut up!" commanded my uncle.

Ikey shut up.

My uncle stirred the mess on the deck again with his toe.

"This truck can go for'ard again," says

he. "Can't confiscate his lawful possessions."

"Aw, t'anks; you're a good guy, Chief—" burst out Ikey.

"Urrgh!" delivered my uncle, and so savagely Ikey almost collapsed where he stood. "D'ye know what I can do to you for bringing deadly weapons into my ship? That's a felony, m'lad. State's prison for life, m'lad! D'ye know what the statutes say?"

My uncle recited the statutes from memory. I guess he was correct, or nearly so. It sounded horrific to me—and to Ikey. Here was the Law speaking, the terrible, omnipotent Law, rolling out of the mouth of his majesty, the captain.

"By blank dash, you dash-blank," cried he, forgetting the day at last in his fervor, "I've a good mind to take the hide clean off you with a rope's end, m'lad, and for two cents I would!"

"Oy!" said Ikey. It was a weak and piteous bleat.

"Just let me take him in hand, Captain?" urged Mr. O'Brien.

"Hump!" said my uncle. "No, mister; it's hardly the day for that."

My uncle had already caught himself up and was, I knew, concerned and ashamed for his un-Sabbath-like slip of speech. He never swore on Sunday—in fair weather. So he made Mr. O'Brien pay for it.

"He needs a punishment that will sink in, mister; not the coddling that a close relative would give him, mister; no, I'll attend to him myself." Oh, it was a bitter insult, and Mr. O'Brien nearly choked on the end of his mustache as he struggled to keep his temper.

"Chuck him into the lazaret!" my uncle commanded the third mate. "We'll let the rats play tag with him while he thinks over what he's done."

V

SO, FOR a full week, Ikey had his residence in the inky-dark storeroom beneath the cabin floor, his feet shackled to a stanchion, his couch the rough boards under him, his playfellows the rats, who played hide-and-go-seek as well as tag, his fare sea-bread and water and bilge reek, his occupation meditating upon his sins—my uncle assumed.

A very severe punishment, let me tell you, and befitting the serious crime he had committed. For it was a very serious crime to bring firearms into a windjammer's focsle and brandish them about the decks, no matter what the motive. My uncle might very well have kept Ikey imprisoned for the rest of the passage and then turned him over to the authorities for trial and jailing; and if Ikey had been a hard case in habitual open rebellion against ship authority that surely would have been his fate.

A more sensitive nature would probably have got the horrors down there in that black hole, with the scurrying and squeaking of unseen rats always in his ears, and the fetid, stifling air—for we were long since in the heat of the tropics—pressing upon him like a weight. In hot weather the lazaret was a place in which to gasp for breath when the hatch was closed.

I lost sleep over my awful lubber; first, because my discovered intimacy with him earned me a severe hiding, as I feared it would when Ikey confessed; second, because I couldn't help imagining how I would feel cooped up in the hold on bread and water, and naturally I transferred my imagined feelings to Ikey's breast. So, one afternoon in midweek, I took a terrifying chance and slipped below to console him. No one was in the cabin at the time save Old Adam, and I knew he wouldn't give me away.

I might have saved my worry. Far from being a wild-eyed and starving maniac, Ikey was peacefully asleep and snoring lustily. I awakened him with resentful kicks. His first words were—

"Say, kid, vat did his Nibs do wit' me cheps an' shoit?"

"They're in your bunk," said I shortly. If he didn't want sympathy, I did. "I got a nice licking on your account."

"If it was dat big stiff, I'll make it a get-even for you when we get out dere," he promised. "Say, dis ain't so bad."

He was gobbling down the cabin food I had stolen for him.

"Aren't you scared down here?" I asked.

"For why?" says he, in genuine surprize.

"This dark—and rats—and you asleep—" I tried to suggest the terror I would feel in his place.

"I've slept in woise holes many a time," replied he. "Dis ain't so bad, kid, an' now I got me belly full I feel like a two-year-old. Dat big stiff can't pick on me down here, an' dey ain't no woik to do. I should worry me a wrinkle about dis. But, say, kiddo—" this very wistfully—"y'tink youse could sneak it me larry-at to me? I could just as well be practisin' me t'row, sittin' here all day wit' nuttin' else to do. Say, kid, I might loin to t'row it in de dark, and vat a hit I would make it wit' de other cowpoys!"

I was quite cheerful the rest of that week. I grinned at my uncle and the mate—behind their backs. Fine joke, I thought, Ikey actually enjoying his punishment, exulting in his all night in, and his all day without work, and they thinking all the time he was suffering torments. Twice again I carried him food. But not the longed for "larry-at"; he couldn't eat that and I was afraid it would be discovered. Not once did Ikey express a wish to be liberated.

But liberated he was when Sunday rolled around again. Perhaps it was my uncle's intention to keep him immured for a week and no longer; perhaps the gospel he read this day moved him to pity. I think it must have been the latter, because he read me a long lecture upon the virtue of mercy.

Shortly afterward he had Ikey brought up from the black hole and read the blinking, cringing wretch a much longer lecture on the virtue of obedience and the blessedness of Christian charity, and then he kicked Ikey out on deck, literally and bodily, and told him to go for'ard and turn to and see that he behaved himself hereafter, because what would happen to him next time would make him wish he'd never been born.

When, after dark, I slipped forward to commiserate with him, I discovered him enthroned on Big Fritz's sea-chest, shoveling down a huge meal to which all his watchmates had contributed from their own whacks, and, between mouthfuls, singing his favorite song, "Vat I'm Gonna Do To Dat Big Stiff" to the admiring circle. Kicks might dent Ikey's flesh, but not his spirit.

And, indeed, Ikey now discovered himself to be a hero to his shipmates. He was a grand figure to them, a glittering and romantic figure, his lubberhood forgotten, his deeds remembered.

These Dutchies, remember, were not used to up-to-date American methods of sailorizing. This was the first time any of them had ever sweated beneath Old Glory, and the knock-'em-down-work-'em-up routine of the *Commodore Watson* filled them with dismay and resentment.

They had not learned to love the mates. I should say they had not! But they had not learned to protest by word and deed against the discipline which made driven slaves of them. Indeed, no. Protest was alien to their blood.

Being sailors, of course they grumbled, but never very loud, never with ferocity. Reverence of authority and habit of unquestioning obedience was part of their natures. Oh, they were good men, none better; but they were not a spirited crowd. I don't remember a fight among them during the whole passage.

Now to them Ikey, with his gamin's cocksureness, and open scorn of them, his unbridled tongue, his breath-taking deeds, was a very desperate fellow. A tiger of a man. The things he said! The things he did! Waving guns about; taking pot-shots at unpopular mates; slanging the Old Man himself! Yes, that's just the way it appeared to them. His misadventure on the forehatch was a deed colossal. The circumstance that Ikey committed his colossal deed through ignorance, and was more startled and frightened than his victim when the gun went off, was quite ignored by them. No; Ikey was a bad man, a hard, hard case, a desperate fellow to be admired and propitiated, though not emulated. There was a good deal of fear in their admiration.

THE gaudy cowboy regalia had, I am convinced, a lot to do with their worshipful attitude toward my awful lubber. It had been spread out in Ikey's bunk during the week of his absence, and they had feasted their eyes upon it. Find a Dutchman, if you can, who doesn't revere a uniform! Here was a uniform brilliant enough to encase the body of an admiral of line, at least. This lubber in their midst must be a considerable personage in this "vild Vest" he was forever talking about.

Their combined knowledge of Western America was no greater than Ikey's, and that was very little less than my own at that time. To all of us Ikey's vivid word pictures of the mysterious land were true and reasonable—a vast plain thronged with cows and cowboys, miners, Indians, desperadoes and sheriffs, and Ikey, gaily uniformed, astride a rearing steed, six-gun in either hand, popping away at all and sundry.

True, I had been to San Francisco before, and knew it for a large city with many saloons and cobbled streets and street cars that climbed precipitous hills by clinging to a wire rope, and while I had seen some pretty hard cases on that famous waterfront, I had not seen any cows or cowboys, and the geography of the place, as I recalled it, was anything but flat. But then, I assumed, Ikey's vast plain was beyond the hilly city. I was careful never to describe San Francisco to Ikey. You see, I wanted to believe in his delightful country, and, with the admirable mental limberness that went with my years, I easily did believe. I think I believed as whole-heartedly as the Dutchmen.

I mention their belief and hero worship because of the effect it had upon him during the remainder of the passage. It stiffened his back, made his walk more sure, gave a sparkle to his eye that the mate couldn't dim. Aye, he lapped up their faith as a cat laps up cream. To them he wasn't just an embryo cowboy who had never yet caught a cow; to them he was the real article, a picturesque and romantic Lord of High Adventure. To them he was just what he wanted to be to himself.

To me he never pretended, except as a game which we both understood. But to these Dutchies, whom he spoiled with his dice and scorned with his tongue, he must be in truth what he really was in fancy. They believed. From this time on he made it a practise to spin grand yarns about his life in the "vild Vest"—where he had never been—discoursing to them in Yiddish when their English petered out. They took it all as gospel truth, too; I am sure they did. Especially after his thrilling rescue from a watery grave of Frederick Wilhelm Augustus Schultz.

After that dramatic incident, which happened off the Horn, you couldn't have bribed one of those Dutchmen to doubt Ikey's wildest flight of fancy; and the few stiffs in the focsle, who were neither sailors nor squareheads, and who might have doubted, were convinced that silence was the better part of valor. I'll wager that to this day there are North Sea focsles that resound with the saga of Ikey Katz, *ein wunderkerl, der jaeger von kühen.*

But that Sunday night when Ikey was fresh from the lazaret, the imprint of my uncle's number twelve still upon his proud flesh, and his starved stomach not yet gorged to repletion, his haughty humor of later days was yet to be developed. His chief concern that hour was his cowboy clothes, and loud was his joy over the fact that they had not suffered the fate of the weapons. I had told him they were safe when I visited him in the lazaret; but he needed visual proof to completely relieve his mind. As he confessed to me:

"How'd I know dat big stiff vouldn't sneak it dem avay? He swiped me brudder's monicker, didn't he?"

He folded the flaming garments carefully, lovingly, and restored them to the telescope basket.

"Mustn't get dem doity," says he, and rejected with scorn, even horror, my suggestion that he try them on. Shipboard was no place in which to dress up. "Dey might get vet," says Ikey. "Dat big stiff might send me up the ladders, and dey get tore." Going up the ladders was the way Ikey always described going aloft. "I put dem on," says he, "when I leave the boat."

The sailors went to bed after awhile, for not even a hero could keep them from sleep in a watch below. But Ikey and I adjourned to the forehatch and talked out the watch. This night, for the first time, I learned how Ikey came to go to sea. Now his great secret was out, he was eager to confide in me.

I never heard Ikey mention his parents, though I suppose he had them at a tender age. His talk was all "me brudder an' me." He grew up a gamin of the streets in the great city, newsboy, bootblack, and shadow of his beloved relative; so much I already knew.

But now I became acquainted with the true Ikey, the inner Ikey. I learned of his growing dissatisfaction with the streets of New York, of his desire, of years' standing, to forsake the pavements for the wide open spaces where life was free and men were somewhat more than men. I gathered that serious study of Wild West Weeklies, his favorite, and I suspect his only, literature, had a lot to do with shaping his ambition; he admitted frankly that he wanted to be a dashing rider like Flying Fred, a deadly and promiscuous shot like Deadwood Dick, a marvelous roper like Lariat Larry, all three of whom were famous characters in the weekly annals of the wild West.

Six months before a great stroke of good luck befell Ikey. There came to the hotel where he was working as bellboy an actor out of a job. A big ham, Ikey said.

"He wuzn't no real cowpoy, but he had de outfit, see, outta some show dat he acted in."

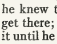
The big ham had no job, but he had, it seemed, an appetite. To satisfy the appetite he, after the custom of his tribe when fallen upon evil times, pledged his wardrobe, garment by garment, with the various and numerous uncles in the neighborhood. For it was a hard-up hotel, quite surrounded by pawnshops. But "de outfit" the big ham did not pawn. He couldn't. His uncles said no.

In his need the hungry actor appealed to Ikey, as being a wise youth who would know all the tricks on the hard-up side of the street. Didn't Ikey know where he could raise something on such fine properties? A dance costumer? A pawnbroker with a heart? Anybody? Look at 'em; stood him eighteen-fifty in Chi, and that hold-up artist down the street offered him fifty cents! Look at 'em; good as new!

Ikey looked at them. He gloated. He fell. Telling me about it, months afterward, his voice shook with emotion. Then and there, on the spot, Ikey, as he put it "coughed up de wind." Ten dollars changed hands, and Ikey held possession and title, the whole outfit, "cheps" and "shoit," kerchief and six-guns. It was a great moment in Ikey's life; I bet he didn't even bargain. He was too happy. I suspect the big ham was pleased too.

Now Ikey's idea of the location of his wild West was extremely vague. It was "out dere." It was a long way from Broadway, he knew that. He even knew one way to get there; "hit de road" and keep on hitting it until he arrived. That's what he planned to do, he told me. For now, with cowboy clothes to wear, he simply had to get "out dere" and wear them. He tarried with his job of hopping bells just long enough to accumulate enough tips to give him a traveling stake.

"A guy has to eat on de road, ain't it?" he explained apologetically, as he confessed his tardiness in heading West.



THIS stake saved, his brakebeam reserved, disaster befell Ikey. "Me brudder, Kink O'Prien" was, it seemed, matched with a young gentleman of foreign extraction known as "Biffo" Yid, and Ikey must, out of loyalty, wait and see "me brudder clean up on him." Also out of loyalty, and a perfectly natural desire to double his road stake, Ikey bet his roll on his brother.

Alas! Ikey told this part of his story in hushed, shamed whispers. Kink O'Prien, it appeared, was not always the invincible, the undefeated champion. Ikey made me swear I would not disclose the shameful fact to the ship, but this night "de kink" was cleaned up on.

"But it wuz a rotten decision, kid; why, rank ain't it de woid. Dey robbed de Kink, kid. An' I tells him vat can he expect, fightin' down dere in a Yid hall, wit' all dem Jews yellin' at Biffo to get de Irisher stiff, and de referee a guy dat wuz buzzin' Biffo's sister, Becky. What does he expect, I tells de Kink. You got your noive, I says, t'inkin' you'd get avay wit' moider down here. But dat talk don't do no good. Dey had me money, de rotten robbers."

Aye, they had his money, his patiently saved road stake which was to keep him alive and in eats while he hit the road to the promised land. They had every cent of it. It was a time for despair.

"I'd have hit de road anyway," said Ikey, "only dat guy, Duckfoot O'Brien, come an' got around me."

Duckfoot was an old acquaintance. He knew all about Ikey's contemplated trip to the wild West. I guess everybody who knew Ikey knew that. And Duckfoot came to Ikey with a plausible and enticing tale. Did Ikey really want to go to the wild West? Then why hit the road, why walk, why starve, why risk his life and his clothes hopping freights, which was, as Ikey knew, a lot more difficult than hopping bells? Why reach the wild West flat, without the price of steed and saddle?

Ah, that Duckfoot was a cunning man; he knew what would appeal to Ikey! Why not take a boat, said Duckfoot, a nice, comfortable boat that was bound for the wildest wild West anybody ever heard of? Why not live a life of ease sailing over summer seas to his destination? And get paid for it!

"I can ship ye," says Duckfoot. "Will ye take it on?"

Would he? I gathered that it took Ikey all of five minutes to quit his job, pack his treasures into a hastily purchased telescope basket, and place himself unreservedly at Duckfoot's disposal.

"When I get back to N' Yoik," says Ikey, wrathfully, "I'm gonna knock dat guy's block off. Tells me dat big stiff will be like it a brudder, tells me y'don't woik hard on boats, tells me dis trip is a pipe. Tells me a pack of doity lies, dat's vat he done. You wait, kid, some day I'll go back to N' Yoik on a visit—an' I ain't goin' by boat—an' he'll t'ink the Brooklyn Bridge fell on him, dat's vat he'll t'ink!"

VI

WE MADE an unusually fine run of it that voyage, fair weather and steady trades, and no buffets of consequence until, off the Plate, a black *pampero* caught us napping, and took some canvas as toll. But there was no grumbling about that, because my uncle made a fair wind of it, and we were Down Under, as they say—that is, in the latitudes of Cape Horn—before the weather moderated.

My uncle was hugely pleased, for now he expected to raise the Farallones under one hundred and twenty days, and thus make a clipper passage of it. So we did; one hundred and fourteen days, into dock. The best passage made that year. A matter for surprized comment ashore, for there were faster ships in the trade.

But my uncle had spent all his life in Cape Horners, and he knew those slatey waters Down Under, and their treacherous ways, as did few other men. Aye, and he was a wizard at making westing. No laying-to and awaiting a fair slant, for Andy Stark; no running south into the Antarctic wastes in search of it; no, he always boasted he hugged the black coast and *made* the slant which carried him around in the teeth of the eternal westerlies.

Fight, fight, fight the howling west wind! That was the way my uncle made his smart weatherings of Cape Stiff. Taking chances; giving way not an inch without a desperate fight.

"Another hand to the wheel, mister; sweat in the lee braces, and carry on!" That was his style.

He used every resource of his ship and every device fathered by his experience; he sacrificed gear, he sacrificed men, but he would not sacrifice his westing. That year other ships were two and three months weathering the cape; the *Commodore Watson*, jamming through the Straits of le Maire, was less than three weeks north to 50 degrees and a fair wind to warm weather.

But you will appreciate that they were not comfortable weeks for any man on board, and least of all for the eighteen men before the mast. They might as well have locked up their castle and thrown the key overboard for all the comfort and shelter it afforded them during that time. Constant working ship in that weather demanded the almost continuous presence on deck of all hands. My uncle went without his rest; why shouldn't the lazy dogs do the same, especially since the ship needed them? They did.

"Rouse 'em up, mister; stir 'em out of it! Raise a sweat on 'em; that'll keep them warm!"

That's how my uncle took his ship around Cape Horn.

It was cold—bitter, bitter cold. Everything one touched, including one's own body, was sodden and cold. Day after day, night after night, in almost continuous procession, the squalls came roaring down upon us, and the stinging sleet, driven almost horizontally before the wind, searched out our exposed and benumbed faces and laced them raw. Sullen gray seas lolloped over the rail and scrubbed the decks with half-drowned men for brooms. The lines we handed, the ratlines we climbed, the footropes we balanced upon aloft, all were icy and slippery; we left the palms of our hands upon the metal jackstays, and split our fingernails to the quick hammering upon iron-like canvas. Day after day it was like this, watch after watch, with never longer than a cat-nap between battles, and with never a dry stitch upon our frozen bodies. Watch after watch! Huh! We actually lost track of watch below. We didn't have any.

"Rouse 'em up, mister!" That was the command most often upon the Old Man's lips.

And how did the cowboy stand the gaff? Well, you'd be surprized. I was, and I was his chum. But his focsle mates weren't. They'd made a hero of him, you see; so all he did was no more than they expected of him.

It was not that Ikey became valuable to the ship except as his beef counted upon a line or a yardarm. He was just as awful a lubber off Cape Horn as off Cape Hatteras.

In a seamanly sense he was the least valuable man in the ship, for he could be always depended upon to do the wrong thing at the right time.

But the spirit of the lad! Ah, that was what surprized me, and more than me, the mates, and even my uncle. They used to say in those ships that the Horn was the test of a man. "Show up his guts," was the blunt expression in vogue. Ikey's were most decidedly the right color.

The cold, the wet, the heavy work, the constant danger—none of these things could raise a bleat from Ikey. Why, they couldn't even wipe the smile from his face. No more howling about his "hoits"; he grinned and bore with them. More than that, he made light of the general misery.

"Why, dis ain't so bad," he would say, as we hugged the scanty shelter in the lee of the deck house. "Youse guys ride de range in a blizzard, den youse'll know somet'ing about vat's bad an' vat ain't. Say, dey laugh at this veather in the vild Vest. Say, dis ain't nuttin' at all."

Thus Ikey to his shipmates, while his teeth clacked together and his chilled body shuddered of the cold and discomfort. He was their hero, their white-haired boy, their *wunderkerl;* could he do less than live up to their opinions? He'd show them what a real wild Wester was like, he'd give them something to admire! Aye, he did. These dumb Dutchmen and squareheads admired and exhibited fortitude; then Ikey, as a brave and untamed cowboy, must exhibit greater fortitude, must indeed, openly scorn the cold and fatigue and danger that was their present lot.

This attitude of his was the ripe bloom of that strange flower of vanity I had seen budding the night he was released from the lazaret, weeks back, in the tropics. As I have mentioned, from that hour Ikey was a brave cowboy. To his fellows at first, and, finally, even to himself.

Up to this time in his life, Ikey had lived in the shadow, so to speak, of his pugilistic brother. Very likely his curious notions about the wild West, and his intense ambition to become a cowboy in that glorious land, were at bottom the efforts of his unconscious mind to escape from thralldom to "me brudder, de kink," and to become, in the sunlight, a grand fellow on his own account. His ego struggling for expression, as the psychological sharks would put it. Aye, of course that was it; ego was one thing Ikey had lots of and to spare.

Well, heaven knows, his ego quickly learned self-expression once given the initial shove in the right direction. Warmed by the sun of the focsle's admiration, braced by the focsle's somewhat awed respect, Ikey began to think very well of himself. Almost too well. He still boasted about "me brudder, de kink" as much as ever; but he also began to boast about himself. Soon he no longer slouched about the decks, he strutted. Gradually, as he observed the focsle expected it of him, he began to suffer persecution without wailing, indeed, with open scorn. His blood wouldn't permit him to keep quiet about his wrongs; but he learned to laugh at them.

And he certainly had a lot to laugh at. The mate was openly furious because Ikey had been returned to duty; he had hoped and expected that this insolent gutter-snipe, the very sight of whom pricked his pride to the quick, would spend the balance of the passage in durance. He had so advised the Old Man. And now, after one short week, the swab was thrust under his nose again, and the threadbare quips anent the relationship were again insulting his ears.

The captain had refused even to log Ikey, and explained his mercy by saying he didn't want to disgrace the O'Brien name. He'd lost again at chess that night. Mr. O'Brien grew very bitter. Day by day he grew more bitter. And Ikey felt that bitterness.

The third mate was openly pleased when Ikey returned to duty. Old Job Pennyman was not a man easily to forgive and forget. Not with blue powder marks permanently decorating his cheek; not with the memory of his ruined pipe permanently rankling in his mind. The third mate desired nothing better than a chance to make it hot for Ikey. He'd show that specimen what it meant to be a lubber in this man's ship!

Between them they kept Ikey dancing to a very lively tune, indeed. The mate thought up the hard and nasty jobs, and the third mate saw to it that Ikey did them. Old Job rarely laid a hand on him; he was no bucko, but he was an expert nagger and he could drive an ordinary man almost insane with his tongue. Ikey grinned at him, and worked. Aye, he worked. All day, and often half the night, when O'Brien thought of something he could do.

Mr. O'Brien by no means contented himself with working up Ikey. His lacerated pride needed stronger salve. He hit Ikey. He kicked him. He cursed him. Every day and all day he did this—except on Sunday. The constant gibes of my uncle and Mr. Bates, directed at the famous pride, kept him ever in a temper against Ikey. He disliked the very sight of him. So it was "Here, you this-and-that!" and "Hey, you so-and-so!" and a cuff and a kick, every time he came within reach of the poor lubber.

And Ikey grinned at Mr. O'Brien. This infuriated the mate, but he couldn't do anything about it. He couldn't wipe the grin off Ikey's face. As well punch or kick an India-rubber man. Ikey was tough, no gainsaying that fact. Blows seemed to glance off him without doing any damage to speak of; or perhaps it was the peculiar circumstance that his arms and legs always seemed to be between the blows and the more tender portions of his anatomy.

SO THE mate raged, and Ikey grinned, and the focsle looked on and marveled, and admired hugely. Ikey could not have hit upon a scheme of defense that would have hurt more the tender feelings of Mr. O'Brien. For it gave Mr. O'Brien no chance really to injure Ikey. The latter was careful never to make an insolent reply and never to offer the slightest resistance to the blows of authority; it had become firmly fixed in Ikey's mind that the persons of the afterguard were sacred and untouchable aboard ship. Ikey just grinned and endured, and obeyed all orders to the best of his ability, and Mr. O'Brien could find no excuse for belaying pins or brass knuckles.

"Say, dat big stiff can't sock woit' a cent," Ikey bragged in the focsle. "Say, he can't hoit me. I bet it he could sock me all day, an' I vouldn't feel it no more'n he wuz a baby; say, when I make it a spar wit' me brudder, de kink, I take it a sockin' dat would knock dat big stiff cold, an' it don't hoit me none. Out in de vild Vest we laugh at guys like dat big stiff." And then, the eternal refrain. "Vait till we get out dere—I'll show dat big stiff!"

His worshipful shipmates believed it. I was almost coming to believe it myself.

I had to carry on my intimacy with Ikey under cover. I didn't want another hiding, and my uncle had commanded me to stay aft where I belonged, when it wasn't my watch on deck. This meant, to my great sorrow, that I could no longer romp about the fore-decks in the dog-watches, playing cow to Ikey's lasso.

But if I could no longer engage in this fascinating game, I found consolation and compensation in secret perusal of Ikey's library. I carried the gaudy paper-backs aft, one by one, stuffed in my shirt, and read them in the guarded privacy of my bunk. The World's Best Literature—to this day I swear it. Nothing I've ever read since has afforded me half the thrill and pleasure I obtained from those grand narratives of life in the wild West. Ikey's wild West. The wild West of a boy's dreams and fancies. In the night watches, Ikey and I discussed the stories, and compared preferences.

I was quite decided by now to skip the ship in Frisco, and become a wild Westerner on my own account. I intended to become a boy sheriff, after my favorite character in the weeklies, a rough, tough and rowdy boy sheriff who ate bad men and six-guns for breakfast, dinner and supper. If I couldn't be a boy sheriff, I'd be a boy stage-robber. There were some good points about that profession. Perhaps, I thought, I'd be both.

But, to Ikey's incredulous surprize, I decided I didn't want to be a cowboy. It seemed to me to be a foolish pastime to chase cows up and down mountains and across plains, only to lasso them in the end, and sell them for beef. A lot of hard work, it struck me; and even if one had greasers and rustlers to play with between round-ups, cowboying didn't seem to me to be as attractive as other wild Western occupations. In fact, I confessed to Ikey, I didn't like cows; I stopped liking them when my Aunt Martha's brindle bull chased me up a maple tree and kept me there all through one chilly autumn afternoon.

"A cowpoy would 'a' roped de critter," explained Ikey scornfully. "When youse can t'row it de larry-at, catchin' cows is fun."

Lariat Larry was Ikey's own particular hero. The volumes devoted to the adventures of that marvelous young man were thumbed to tatters, so often had Ikey read them. He still read them, although he knew them almost by heart. He read them aloud, sitting on Big Fritz's sea-chest, the focsle lamp spluttering above his shoulder, his forefinger carefully following the text, now and then stuttering and skipping when he came to an extra big word.

Around about him sat his shipmates reverently listening, their peasant faces alight with wonder. It was real to them. They believed. Even more than I believed. They believed as Ikey believed. In fact, I think they believed that *Lariat Larry* was Ikey, himself, and that what he read were chapters from his own life. It sounded like their Ikey. Even I had to admit that *Lariat Larry* was a really superior cowboy; he didn't chase cows exclusively. He also chased bears and Indians and bad men and wild-cats; his deadly noose necked them all, men and beasts. Occasionally *Lariat Larry* shot some one. But not often. He preferred to lasso his prey.

How Ikey loved *Lariat Larry*. How Ikey loved himself!

I couldn't play cow for him, but Ikey did not lack for practise on that account. Indeed, he now had a whole herd of cows to practise upon. It was no longer beneath the dignity of the A. B.'s to run before the pursuing loop. It really was a fine sport, and once the Dutchmen started playing cow they kept it up. Some of them even fashioned lassoes of their own, but none of them developed Ikey's skill.

His aim became nearly certain; especially after Big Fritz manufactured him a new, long rope of greased and stretched manila. This rope was the very apple of Ikey's eye. He hung it on a peg just inside the focsle door, where he could reach in and grab it whenever he had a chance to practise. And out of gratitude, he allowed Big Fritz to win back some of his own clothes at craps.

It was on the morning we sighted Diego Ramirez, that bleak, black outpost of the Stiff, that Ikey, finally and for all time, secured himself in the eyes of the focsle as a great man and cowboy. Before this morning there may still have existed a doubt in one or two minds; but after this morning not a head among them, either square or round, but accepted Ikey's gaudiest reminiscence and prophesy as gospel. He certainly became *Lariat Larry* in the flesh.

EVERYBODY felt good that morning. It meant something to sight the Ramirez when westward bound; it meant that with a little luck we would be leaving our present miseries behind, for with the Ramirez safely astern, the cape was weathered. It was blowing great guns, but nobody cared, for we were more than holding our own. My uncle tugged his beard and recited a psalm at Mr. O'Brien—it was Sunday—and the latter felt so cheerful he actually told the Old Man that these parts didn't look like green pastures to him. That was cheek, but my uncle graciously overlooked it. He decided that he might edge another inch or so with more pressure on her head, and ordered some sail made.

So presently Frederick Wilheim Augustus Schultz was out over the bows, with naught betwixt his heavy sea-boots and the boiling sea save the slender wire stay upon which he balanced, and with both his hands engaged in casting off the gaskets which bound the jib. Others of us were going aloft to shake out a reef in the upper tops'l. I was in the rigging when it happened and had a fine view of the whole thing.

Ikey, because he was such a lubber, was seldom sent "up de ladders" when a job like this was in progress. He gummed things up too easily. He was kept on deck with the other lubbers, and the older and less agile men; for if he were useless aloft, his beef was always valuable on a line. So it happened that at the critical moment he was standing by the foretops'l halliards, almost within arm's reach of the focsle door and his larry-at.

A big, gray sea reared up on the weather bows and fell aboard, quite burying the focsle head and cascading tons of water down upon the fore decks. When her head came up again, and the black length of the jib-boom was bared, Frederick Wilheim Augustus Schultz was missing.

We aloft screamed out, "Man overboard!" Might as well have shouted, "Man dead!" That's what we really meant. Any poor sailor who went overboard in a Cape Horn gale was bound for the Deep Locker, and everybody knew it. No launching a boat in that howling dirt, and the cold and the weight of his clothes would drag a man under almost instantly. Poor Dutchy was overboard; poor Dutchy was gone—barring a miracle.

I didn't see Ikey leave his post at the halliards. I was staring down into the boiling waste to leeward where I saw a patch of yellow which I thought was Schultz's oilskins. It was; an instant later I saw his face, white and horrible, contorted with the cries that did not reach our ears. Some freak of the waves kept him not many yards from the ship's side, yet he was far too distant for a rope's end to reach him. He was fast washing astern; already he was past the beam; another moment he would be astern of the ship, and gone. Gone for good!

It was then that I saw Ikey. We all saw him. He was in the main rigging, his legs wrapped around a shroud, his hands busy with his larry-at. The rope shot out from him like a long, thin snake, and its end settled down exactly upon the patch of yellow in the water. A long throw and a true one. We knew instantly it was true aim, for Ikey snubbed the line about the sheer pole, and it straightened out as it felt the weight at its end. Then came Ikey's shrill hail which even the wind could not smother:

"Oy! Oy! I got him!"

He had. Most securely and uncomfortably he had got him. Around the neck, in fact. Frederick Wilheim Augustus Schultz wasn't drowned that voyage, but he was nearly hanged as his jubilant shipmates hauled him back aboard. He surely would have hanged if Mr. O'Brien had not hung over the rail—at imminent risk of going overboard himself—and obtained a firm clutch on the rescued man's hair, relieving thus the pressure on his windpipe.

"Smart work, m'lad!" said Mr. O'Brien to Ikey. Aye, fancy that! Praise, from the great O'Brien's own lips. "Smart work, m'lad!"

And did Ikey say—

"Thank 'ee, sir, thank 'ee, kindly?"

No, Ikey did not. Ikey said:

"Call dat smart woik? Say, cowpoys vould laugh at dat t'row. You oughtta seen me neck it me brudder, Kink O'Prien, one time when he wuzn't lookin' an' I wuz goin' by in a wagon. Say, dat wuz a t'row!"

What Mr. O'Brien replied will not bear repeating. But Ikey had the last word, as usual—when the mate was beyond hearing.

"Dat big stiff'll catch it a surprize some day," says Ikey.

IT WAS a bright January morning when the tug, which we had picked up off the Farallones, towed us in through the Golden Gate. We were a clean ship and an exhausted crew.

All the way from the Horn we scrubbed and rubbed, tarred down and painted up, all to the end that the old hooker might go into port with a bright and shining face. Pride again. Professional pride. No housewife could be more particular and finicky about the appearance of her house, when expecting company, than was my uncle about the appearance of his ship when going into port.

And even more particular than the captain was the mate. He it was who was really held responsible for the ship's appearance and condition. In port other masters and mates would see the *Commodore Watson* and would discuss her. Mr. O'Brien, with my uncle's encouragement, made sure they would discuss her admiringly.

Work, work—and more work. Holystones, while the Southern Ocean winds yet roared through the rigging; holystones, while we boxed the compass on the Line; still holystones, when, weeks later, the Old Man changed the course for the last time, and the ship stood in to port. Not a man in that crew but owned an aching back and a housemaid's knee.

But the decks were white. Aye, they were dazzling white, whiter than any man-o-war's decks; and the poop deck, sanded and scraped by hand, oiled and rubbed by hand, glowed in the sun like a great expanse of golden satin. Woe betide the lubber who ventured upon that deck with nails in the heels of his boots!

Of course, Ikey was that lubber.

Work, more work. Sand and canvas and elbow grease; soogie-moogie that took the skin off one's hands as readily as it removed grime from a painted surface. The paint laid on with careful brush before Mr. O'Brien's very critical eye. Ah, he loved his paintwork, did O'Brien. Every stroke must be just so, and the marks of the brush must not show when the paint dried. From the way he hovered over the painters one would think he was directing the painting of a masterpiece, instead of the daubing of the bulwarks, or the sides of the house. Woe betide the lubber who blundered against his fresh paint!

Ikey was that lubber.

We tarred down. It was no skimpy, perfunctory job in the *Commodore Watson*. It was more like a religious rite, the solemn preparations we made and the earnest way we went about it. Foot by foot we went over the vast web aloft, and every piece of serviced standing gear received its bath of glistening stockholm.

A mussy job, but not so mussy as you would think. For our skin's sake we tarry boys had to be careful. Careful what we touched with our tarry bodies, more careful what we touched with our tarry wads of oakum, and most careful of all with the carriage of our tar pots, which hung from our belts, as we clambered about aloft. For down below were white decks, and wide surfaces of unmarred paint. Woe betide the lubber who splattered tar where it did not belong. He'd pay for it.

Ikey did. And Ikey paid.

All the way from Cape Horn to the Golden Gate Ikey paid. He paid for being a lubber. He paid for being alive. For during the latter half of the passage Ikey's mere existence was an offense in King O'Brien's eyes. An offense that became greater the nearer we were to port.

Living aft, I readily understood O'Brien's attitude. I witnessed the growth of his insane hatred and fear of Ikey. Aye, fear. In the Atlantic the mate's sentiments were comparatively mild; he despised Ikey and roughed him because of the lubber's stubborn insolence in persisting in his claim to relationship. That was insult; no more. But in the Pacific an element entered the case that speedily changed Mr. O'Brien's contempt into a stronger and more deadly emotion.

"What would people say?"

My uncle and Bates were responsible for the change. They discovered, quite by accident, a new way to reach the famous pride.

"I suppose, mister," said my uncle, one day, "you'll be taking that brother of yours about when we get to port, introducing him to all the boys as your junior and heir?"

My uncle intended that to be a pin prick, just one of the little pin pricks that he and the second mate delighted to give the pride. But the mate's startled face, and the manner in which he turned on his heel and stamped below and slammed the door of his room behind him, told my uncle and Mr. Bates that this shaft had scored a deeper wound. No more was needed for such inveterate practical jokers. My uncle winked at Bates, and Bates winked at the cro'jack yard, and the game was on.

Every day they added fuel to the fire they had started. They spoke feelingly of the sensation on the Barbary Coast when the famous King O'Brien hove in sight with his brother in tow.

"All dressed up in his circus clothes!" said my uncle.

They pictured the delight of the San Francisco O'Briens when they learned that their renowned chieftain had brought his younger brother around for their inspection and admiration.

"Them togs, now—the royal O'Brien uniform, isn't it?" asked Bates, with sly respect.

Oh, how Mr. O'Brien squirmed beneath that ragging. He wasn't a joking man; in him the Irish wit had frozen into pride. He couldn't retort suitably; he couldn't curse my uncle who was his captain, and Bates didn't care if he did curse him—he wasn't going to spoil good fun by getting mad. So Mr. O'Brien was helpless.

"By the Lord Harry, if you won't take your own brother about the town," says my uncle, "I'll do it myself!"

That was the threat that finished Mr. O'Brien, that swelled his heart with rage and knotted his entrails with terror—sheer terror. For he believed my uncle was joker enough to do what he said. And if he did—where would the O'Brien hide his face?

It was the pride, the terrible pride which owned him body and soul. A curious thing, pride, at times more like a disease than an emotion. A thing of strange strengths and weaknesses. Now Peter King O'Brien was undoubtedly a courageous man. His splendid sea record proved it, again and again. Why, I can imagine King O'Brien facing a lion barehanded without exhibiting any fear. His pride would sustain him.

Yet his pride couldn't stand the threat of ridicule. That's why he was terrified of Ikey. Ikey, in the hands of my uncle and Mr. Bates, would make him ridiculous on the San Francisco waterfront, and that meant he would be ridiculous throughout the whole merchant service.

Ridiculous! He, the last and greatest of *the* O'Briens! He, who had swaggered like a king and bragged like a parliament in waterside barrooms all over the world, he, the marked man, the great man, he, to whom dignity was all in all—he was to become a laughing stock! They'd laugh him off the Barbary Coast. They'd laugh him off the seas. They'd laugh him into oblivion, and his memory would be no more than a drunk's guffaw.

All because of Ikey Katz.

What could he do about it? That question undoubtedly sloshed about the corridors of Mr. O'Brien's mind, knocking at this door and that, and receiving no good answer at any. Well, what could he do about it?

He could make Ikey pay in advance. Aye, he could do that. He did. He gave Ikey a hazing, from the Horn northward, that would have broken a Chinaman.

But it didn't break Ikey. He had his pride to sustain him. Wasn't he the little tin god of the focsle, with a score of men hanging on his every word? Wasn't he the brother of "Kink O'Prien"? Wasn't he *Lariat Larry* in the flesh? Then how could he show fear of this blustering fiend who was ever on his heels? Ikey stood the gaff. Ikey grinned.

THE deuce of it was, Ikey was such an awful lubber. The mate never lacked a good excuse for jumping him. He dropped things, he spilled things, he committed crimes against the ancient etiquette of the sea, and was guilty of other crimes against the ship's work.

He actually lassoed a pot of paint, and spilled its contents on the freshly stoned deck—and spent all that night cleaning up the mess to an accompaniment of kicks and glares and hot language. Mr. O'Brien threw the lasso overboard, the same loved rope that had saved the life of Frederick Wilheim Augustus Schultz.

Ikey really suffered. But he grinned. And that uncanny skill he had—if skill it were; we didn't know—of interposing his limbs between his body and the mate's fists and feet saved him from suffering any serious physical damage. Ikey occasionally showed a split lip or a black eye, and a gash or two on his granite-like skull; nothing worse, which was a miracle, considering how he was used.

"Dat big stiff can't hoit me!" bragged Ikey.

Of course, it would be preposterous to say that the mate planned to murder Ikey. Not consciously. But a pride such as his is a fearful thing, and when it meets a pride like Ikey's it does fearful things. If the brutal hazing had unseated Ikey's reason and caused him to jump overboard—well, I don't think King O'Brien would have sat down and cried. But if that dark thought were in O'Brien's mind, it was doomed to disappointment. Ikey preferred grinning to suicide.

But another plan, pride inspired, was, I am sure, behind Mr. O'Brien's actions. He'd make the ship so scorching hot for Ikey that, when port was reached, Ikey would go, and stand not upon the order of his going. He'd fool those two jokers aft. When they came to parade Ikey, there would be no Ikey. If he could manage it, Ikey would go the moment the ship touched the dock.

That must have been his scheme or he would never have continued his hazing right into the port of San Francisco. That sort of thing wasn't done in port.

But the last beating King O'Brien gave Ikey was when we were actually inside the bay, well inside, and the tow-rope was inboard and the tug alongside to swing us into the dock. This was the moment Mr. O'Brien chose to speed the parting lubber.

I'll admit Ikey gave provocation. Ikey always gave provocation. This time, although a fresh breeze was blowing, he casually squirted a stream of tobacco juice over the rail to windward. The stream came back aboard; it speckled the front of the clean white shirt that Mr. O'Brien had exhumed from his sea-chest and donned in honor of the day; it speckled the spotless paintwork on the face of the cabin. Yes, Mr. O'Brien had an excuse.

He instantly seized it. He regarded his decorated bosom, and he lifted his head and roared like a wild beast. Like a wild beast he leaped upon poor Ikey. His flailing arms should have stretched a senseless lubber at his feet—but somehow they didn't. He sent Ikey reeling across the deck with staggering blows, then he sent him reeling back again.

As his rage mounted, his reason ebbed, and he snatched an iron belaying pin from the rail and brandished it. I really believe he would have struck down Ikey with that deadly billet, murdered him and swung for it afterward—for we were in port, where regrettable incidents couldn't be hushed up—but Ikey didn't wait for the blow to fall. Ikey turned tail and ran. Yes, at the last Ikey ran, ran like a deer, ran forward and ducked into the focsle.

Mr. O'Brien pursued, but he didn't follow him inside. He stood outside and swore at him through the door. Afterward the cook told me what he said.

"If you are not out of this ship five minutes after we dock, I'll splatter your brains on the deck!"

That is part of what Mr. O'Brien said to Ikey through the focsle door.

WE WERE busy tying her up, too busy to give much thought to Ikey. Why should we think about him? The tin god was dented. The hard case was vanquished. The dauntless cowboy, ***Lariat Larry***, had turned tail and run—and there had been no grin on his face as he ran. I don't know if Frederick Wilheim Augustus Schultz felt that way about it, but I am sure his comrades did.

"The king is dead, long live the king—O'Brien!"

Up on the dock were the crimps' runners with their bottles of free red-eye, waiting to get at the crew, and the chandlers' agents and butchers' runners waiting to get at the captain, and a great mob of loafers and curiour people drawn by the spectacle of a square-rigger coming into dock fresh from sea. We gazed at them with envious eyes, and the moments were all too long ere we too might feel the wharf planking, so different from deck planking, beneath our feet.

Nobody on board saw Ikey clear the rail. But he must have jumped for it, for the mooring hawsers were not yet belayed upon the bits, when we spied him upon the dock. Standing on the stringer, in front of the whole mob, looking down upon us. The real Ikey. Cowboy Ikey. Aye, he had dressed up at last, dressed up to go ashore. "Cheps" and "shoit" and purple kerchief—and his inseparable dicer jammed down on his head. His grin was back.

I think every man aboard stopped what he was doing and stared. Who could help it? Here was a sight to appear without warning before men's eyes! Even the pilot gaped; and the great mob on the dock was too startled by the sudden appearance of this colorful and vocal apparition to do more than look and listen.

Ikey spoke over our heads to the transfixed Mr. O'Brien.

"Hey, dere, you big stiff, who you say youse gonna beat it up? Say, you big stiff, youse couldn't beat it up a baby."

That was his beginning. But not his end. Ikey treated us to language. He knew a lot of strange words before ever he came into the ship, and during the voyage he had learned lots more, mostly from Mr. O'Brien. And now he heaped them all upon that worthy's dazed head. He called Mr. O'Brien more names than I knew were in the common speech. Not nice names, either. He wound up by shouting:

"C'mon up here, you big stiff, an' I'll show youse a t'ing or two! C'mon up here, where dey ain't no guns and clubs, an' I'll knock de block offen youse!"

At this the mob found its numerous voice. This was a fight; this was fine! Jeers and yells and hoots showered down upon us—all directed at Mr. O'Brien.

Then Ikey's voice addressing the mob:

"He ain't Kink O'Prien. Me brudder, dat's de kink; me brudder, de champ of New Yoik City—an' dat guy swipes it me brudder's monicker and says he's de Kink O'Prien. He ain't. He's a big stiff, dat's vat he is!"

The mob agreed. Heartily agreed. A hundred voices yelled "Big Stiff!" at the ship.

Mr. O'Brien was past the very limit of his endurance.

"Look after the spring-lines, mister," he called to the second mate, and then he deserted his post.

Let the ship moor herself; he was going to settle with this fellow for once and for all. He was up on the dock in two bounds, and bearing down on Ikey; and if murder were not in King O'Brien's mind before, it surely was now.

It was more than flesh and blood could stand. We all deserted our work and clambered up on the dock. Even my uncle stepped up on the poop rail to see better. A hundred dollars' worth of paint was rubbed off the ship's side in the next few moments, and my uncle never said a word about it.

No matter what his humor a half hour ago, Ikey was in no runaway mood now. He stood up to Mr. O'Brien's onslaught;

more, he stepped forward to meet it. The mob had pressed back and left a semicircle, and in this space the two met. O'Brien's rush was that of a wild bull—and it was checked as suddenly as a wild bull's rush might be checked with a lariat. But it wasn't Ikey's larry-at that stopped him. It was his fist, which, in some mysterious way, slid past the mate's swinging arms to crash with terrific force against his nose. O'Brien went down.

"Claret de foist wallop," commented Ikey. "C'mon, you big stiff, get up and fight!"

Mr. O'Brien got up. He lay down again, instantly and forcibly.

"Dat's Kink O'Prien's Special," says Ikey. "Dat's de wallop he puts it 'em to sleep wit'."

But Mr. O'Brien wasn't asleep. Not yet. He was groggy, but he came up for more.

He got plenty more. He got the most terrific lacing I ever saw a man get, in the ring or out. Imagine our amazement as we witnessed it—and our not too well concealed joy! King O'Brien, that famous fighting bucko getting licked! Why, he was actually helpless before the fists of the lubber whom he outweighed by thirty pounds at least, this awful lubber whom he had hazed from New York harbor to this very dock.

Not that O'Brien didn't fight well. He fought like a wild man. That's it—like a wild man. While Ikey fought with the cool and easy manner of a professional. Why, he hardly seemed to exert himself as he chopped Mr. O'Brien's face and reputation to pieces.

Ikey ducked and sidestepped, danced in and planted crashing blows, and danced out and away from O'Brien's swings. And for every blow he landed, Ikey had a comment.

"Dat's for me larry-at!"

It was a smash against the bridge of an already crimsoned nose; it stretched O'Brien flat for perhaps the seventh time, and caused both eyes to puff immediately.

"Dat's for kickin' me when I spilled de tar!" "Dat's for hittin' me when I busted de lamp!"

So it went. Ikey had many wrongs to remember, and he remembered many of them.

But he remembered most of all the theft of his brother's title by his bull-necked antagonist. Every other blow was a reference to that unforgivable sin.

"Yah! You ain't no Kink O'Prien. Youse a chaw mick—dat's you!"

And again:

"How y'like dat? Me brudder, de kink's best cross, dat wuz!"

Then, at last, when even the mob was beginning to murmur at the slaughter:

"Take dis for de kink, and loin it not to swipe a good guy's monicker!"

"Dis" was a blow that started somewhere near Ikey's heel and ended on the point of Mr. O'Brien's gory jaw. Instantly afterward Mr. O'Brien slept. Slept as more than once Ikey had slept on the decks of the *Commodore Watson*. Mr. O'Brien was finished. He was knocked out.

Ikey carefully wiped his hands on the dock, so he wouldn't soil his clothes with the blood on them. Not his blood. Why, the fellow was practically unmarked. Skinned knuckles; no more. He wasn't even disarranged. In a that furious combat not even his hat had been knocked over his eye.

He regarded the fallen man thoughtfully for a moment, and then addressed the crowd.

"Dat big stiff vouldn't believe it I wuz de brudder of Kink O'Prien," he said. "But I bet he believes it now. Me brudder—he's Kink O'Prien, de one an' only, an' de champeen lightweight of New Yoik City."

As he turned away he added a remark addressed half to himself which only a few of us heard.

"And I can lick me brudder," says Ikey.

He turned his back on us and on the ship, and set off down the dock toward the city. No one called "Halt," you may be sure. No crimp's runner tried to snare him. He walked alone, a flaming figure in the sunlight. From a hundred yards distant he threw a farewell to me over his shoulder.

"So long, kiddo! I sleep it on de range wit' de cowpoys tonight!"

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THE pre-Columbus voyagers to America, in particular the Northmen, and was it the Romans who left paved streets in Maine? Also the names of some six-masted square-riggers. I've put Captain Rotch in touch with Hugh Pendexter.

Leschi Park, Seattle, Washington.

I see where Gordon Young asks information *re.* six-masted ships. I suppose by this he means six-masted square-riggers. Not having my dope with me I cannot give exact information, but if memory serves me the following are all six-masted square-riggers, though as for being ships I can't say; think they are or were barks: *Prussian*, six-masted German ship; *Sophie Rickmas*, six-masted German bark; *La France*, six-masted French bark; *Kobenhaven*, six-masted Danish aux. bark.

The above can be verified by a glance at Lloyds Register and I think Mr. Young will find they all sport six sticks. As for fore-and-afters, they are fairly common.

IN THE same issue, in "Ask Adventure," Mr. P. V. Shaw stated that a British dreadnaught went up the Amazon as far as Iquitos. I wonder if he has mistaken the dreadnaught for the *U. S. S. Wilmington* that went as far as Iquitos in 1899. In his report her captain states "The river above Manaos, even in high water, is not safe for vessels of over 14-ft. draught," the *Wilmington* drawing 9 ft.

I WAS very interested in Hugh Pendexter's short account of the paved roads found in Maine, and if they were the work of the Romans. I have contended that either a Roman or a Mediterranean ship of some kind visited the northern part of N. A.

I had a couple of interesting books on the voyages of the early Northmen to our coast. As they are out of print, the things are hard to get. I found them in the collection of a well known man in Seattle. They make good reading. "Antiquitates Americanæ ante Columbus in America," by Hafniæ, 1837. This one I had to have translated to me.

"The Northmen in New England" by Joshua Foulmin Smith. This is published in the "American Antiquities" and I failed to note the date, but think it was 1853. Smith said in part: "They left Greenland in the spring of 1007, stayed at Straumford (Buzzards Bay) during the winters of 1007-1008, in the autumn preceding which Snorri Thorfinnson was born, stayed the following winter 1008-1009 at Hop, and the next, 1009-1010, again at Straumford, and returned to Greenland in the spring of 1010, after an absence of three years. Also that Thorvald's party resided here (Straumford) for the space of three years, from the summer of 1002 to the spring of 1005, and that Lief's (Ericson) party resided here one year from 1000 to 1001 in addition to which Freydis and her husband remained here for one year, from 1011 to 1012. There was born a son to one of the commanders of the expedition, Thorfinn, and named Snorri Thorfinnson in 1007. There were six women in the party. From this child the sculptor Thorvaldson is said to be descended."

That covers about all I have been able to dig up. Though Hafniæ goes more into detail, he is hazy in his dates and contradicts himself a couple of times.

I would like to see an authoritative account of these early discoveries and would be glad to get the title of any book that goes a little deeper into these matters.—Francis Rotch.

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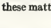

FROM Talbot Mundy something in connection with his serial beginning in this issue—and in connection with things in general:

Let me begin by saying once and for all that this tale of mine is simply fiction and intended to entertain. One or two readers of "OM" have imputed to me the desire to be a propagandist. Nothing seems to me more blatantly ridiculous than that a story-teller should be accused of holding the same beliefs as the characters do in his stories.

If I should write about Mohammed of Mecca as the hero of a story (which I hope some day to do) and if I should try to give what I believe to be Mohammed's view-point and write of him sympathetically (as I will), shall I be branded a Mohammedan? My individual beliefs are nobody's affairs but mine. I have not the right, nor the intention, to impose them on others, indirectly or directly; and I am frank to say, I much prefer a man who disagrees with me, because he has investigated and has formed his own opinions, to one who merely yawps a lot of platitudes that save him from the job of thinking.

NEVERTHELESS, not to be a propagandist, in a way, is to deny one's human heritage. The man who smokes tobacco is a propagandist; so is he who does not. I have personally reached the stage (whether of civilization or of degeneration will will be a matter of opinion) at which gun-play, for instance, no longer interests me very much; nor do the love affairs of flappers, nor the yearnings of beach-combers to find buried treasure. But I am more than ever interested in adventure, and I see vast realms in which to go adventuring if any of you care to come with me. I can promise you excitement. I will guarantee to make you think, if you will go the distance.

That is my particular pet foible. I delight in looking into theories and themes that the "authorities" forbid. If they denounce them, that adds zest to the amusement. I am constituted so that it is utterly impossible for me to overlook such facts as that Columbus, Galileo, Washington, Martin Luther, Spinoza, Mary Baker Eddy, Augusta Stetson, Eliphas Levy, Cagliostro, H. M. Stanley, Francis Bacon, Voltaire, Wagner, Mohammed, H. P. Blavatsky, G. B. Shaw, Tolstoi, Pythagoras, most of the early Christians and almost every discoverer of anything important—all were persecuted, lied about, denounced and excommunicated by the orthodox opinion of their day. There are hundreds of similar examples that will leap to mind. There is not one of those whom I have mentioned who was not an adventurer in the truest and most splendid meaning of the word. One can not possibly agree with all of them nor yet deny their title to be genuine adventurers.

Every single one of those, and hundreds more who might be named, broke through the crust of mass-opinion and left a gaping hole in it, for which the world is in their debt. I, personally, feel in debt to all of them. Their courage, and their willingness to think was an example that appears to me to offset any danger that their doctrines may have caused. It seems to me magnificent to make mistakes whole-heartedly. It is a mean thing, I believe, to shut one's eyes to possibilities in fear of what entrenched opinion may say.

So, if I preach, my subject is "Let's take a look at it, and let's admit the other fellow may be just as right as we are. Then, when we have had a good look, open-mindedly, let's form our own opinions."

WE PEOPLE of the West are much more set in our conservatism than we think we are; and we are much more hidebound by our prejudices than we think. For a century or two (two seconds in eternity) we have been powerful and have subdued the greater portion of the globe. Our energy is indisputable, and our mechanical inventions are superior to anything the world has known at any time of which we have an undisputed record. But I have been amazed to find how many men agree with me in doubting that our progress has been anything except mechanical. (There is a theory with which I agree, but which is seriously challenged by a number of people with whom I have discussed it, that we are less cruel than the ancients were.)

It may not harm us to remember that we are a minority of the world's inhabitants, and that there are races much more numerous than ours, who have attained—in the fields of literature, philosophy, sculpture, painting and government—to heights we have not yet reached. I refer to India and China more particularly, since of those two countries there is written record; but at the back of my mind there is also the thought that the Pacific Islands (some of them) were almost paradise until our western traders and the missionaries came.

But this is not a treatise against missionaries, or against trade. We have all met traders who are honorable men; in fact, we all are traders. There are some of us who love the missionaries. My point is that we are hoodwinked, possibly, by the success of our material achievements to the point where we believe we know it all and consequently think the races we have overwhelmed are superstitious, ignorant, incapable and unheroic fools.

I challenge that peculiarly modern viewpoint. Individually I have met so many thinkers of the East that I believe those races have as high an average of intellectuals as we have—and as low an average of imbeciles. I do not think that any race, at any time, has had much preponderance over others, of anything except energy—the center, or vortex, or crest wave of which, as Flinders Petrie, Spengler and Kenneth Morris have pointed out, moves about the world in cycles, raising one race to its peak as others slowly sink into the trough, to rise again when their time shall come.

It is entirely credible to me that in the distant future men may look back to what shall then be legendary knowledge of our age and think of it either as an age of ignorance, or else an age of black arts when the population flew and carriages were forced along by fire. The two conceptions of us might be simultaneous, since there are Bushmen in the world today as well as missionaries, traders, manufacturers and chemists. I believe that history repeats itself.

NOW, nations (or rather races) that have risen to a higher standard of morality and government than ours, did not do that on nothing. If we choose (as I choose) to admit the possibility that history repeats itself and that the races that have lapsed into comparative inertia may rise again and may again surpass us, the corollary then follows that there must be something in the racial convictions of those peoples that, while differing from ours, is not to be ignored, but rather, studied.

If we accept majority opinion as the final arbiter, then we are hopelessly outvoted. Two-thirds of the population of the world believes in such, to us perhaps extravagant, theories as I have outlined in this story. There are varieties of those beliefs—as there are differences among Western scientists and among Christians all over the world; but Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Mohammedan, Buddhist, Shintoist—all unite in agreement as to the main point.

I do not pretend to say whether that main theory is right or wrong. I do say I have met some individuals and have seen some arresting phenomena; and that the conversation of those individuals, and the nature of those phenomena, have made me think. I found them interesting.

Don't forget: Columbus thought he had reached India. I may have introduced you in this story to a barren island in an ocean of illimitable thought; or it may lead you on to the Fountain of Youth, or to Eldorado, or the Lord knows what else.

IN THE story you will meet with dugpas; and for fear of interrupting the narrative I have cut out explanations of them that to some would have been tedious. The word "dugpa" is translated "sorcerer," but that does not convey the real meaning of it. Here follows the best I can do to explain the word, as it has been explained to me:

Take the Frank case in Chicago, in which a boy was murdered by two youngsters, who admitted that their only object was to commit the "perfect crime." Side by side with that, consider the behavior of any gallant gentleman whose memory comes to mind, who died at his post to save other men's lives. Now take, if you wish, the Christian theory of God and Satan, represented (roughly speaking) in Eastern philosophy as two Forces, one absolutely good and the other absolutely evil.

According to this Eastern theory our characters are composite, made up of good and evil, and the war between those contending forces in us is the process of evolution. According to that theory we humans have evolved up to a point at which we can deliberately take sides in the war (whereas the animals are governed by forces of which they know nothing). That man, again according to the theory, who habitually leans toward the higher intuitions, is in line of progress and accordingly, when faced by a condition or submitted to an impulse, will behave admirably—as for instance, he may choose to die to save the lives of other men.

Contrariwise, whoever leans toward the lower instincts will be governed by them, and degenerate until he grows incapable, or very nearly so, of feeling or responding to a higher impulse. He becomes extremely sensitive to the suggestions of evil and reacts to them where other men would hardly feel they had been "tempted." A man's character, consequently, may be said to be the balance he maintains between those forces; it is inevitably changing all the time, and it makes utterly no difference what religion or philosophy he follows, so be that he is conscious of an effort to improve his own relation to the universe. It is the will to govern one's self gallantly and with restraint that counts, or, rather, that is said to count, by those philosophers of whom I am now writing and to whom Pythagoras, for instance, is supposed by many to have been indebted for his teaching.

NOW; we all know there are advocates of virtue, whether or not we agree with their vision of virtue. There are thousands—there are millions of men and women, who appeal within the limits of their own intelligence to the emotions in us that they hope to stir. I dare say that not one of you who read this article but is a propagandist, by example or spoken word, for what appeals to you as virtue in some form or other. What force is it that actuates —that stirs that will toward improvement? How—whence arrive the impulses that cause the will to function?

We are not so willing to admit, until we think about it, that there are (not so many, possibly, but just as energetic) advocates of evil. And since many of us never pause to discriminate between good and evil, and very few of us indeed do it constantly, we are pulled to and fro between one and the other, our tendency to take sides with one force or the other increasing with habit. This is said to account for those lapses, so hard to explain otherwise, when decent citizens commit sudden and entirely unexpected crimes. (It is said to be particularly true of children.)

WE WESTERN races have dissociated our religion very largely from our daily life and keep it in a pocket by itself, for reference at intervals. But in the East, men do not recognize that separation. Their thinkers, whose proportionate number very likely is no greater or no less than ours, regard every act of daily life as an expression of religion, pure and simple. Thus, the act of cleaning out a cesspool becomes just as much a service to humanity, and just as dignified, if done well, as the delivery of the finest sermon ever preached.

Those (once more, according to this Eastern theory) who consciously are striving, though it may be in abysmal ignorance, to raise their own manhood to a higher level, have allied themselves, although they may not be aware of it, with nature forces that are just as subtle and pervading as the influences that control the stars and make the seed evolve into a tree. Those forces, it is said, would burn us up, as lightning shatters things on the denser material plane, unless reflected to us through a prism, as it were; and the facets of the prism are explained to be those thinkers who, in course of evolution, have evolved to a plane of thought beyond ours. They are able to direct the waves of energy to some extent, as (for the sake of illustration) possibly a gardener controls such natural forces as he understands. As Burbank strives to improve plants, constantly alert for an improving specimen, they are said to think out humanity's problems and to watch for some one they can help along, by methods they have found reliable.

WHICH returns us to the subject of dugpas, who are said to be they who study evil—who ally themselves with the forces of nature that are typified by night and death. In India there is a very numerous cult of Kali-worshippers, whose grizzly goddess is the principle of destruction. They recognize that principle as an existing force and deify it in the way that others deify the principle of good; and it is recognized that their religion leads by rapid stages to depravity.

If it is true that there are individuals who strive to plumb the lowest deeps of evil with the same enthusiasm and persistence that their opposites devote to the pursuit of good, that would account for such crimes as the Frank case in Chicago. What else explains it better? Psycho-analysts admit that there are impulses that govern those whose tendencies, through evil habit, have become degenerate. Whence do the impulses come? If we admit, as we must, that there are men and women who deliberately labor to inspire the world with good, shall we deny that there are others whose deliberate intention is to fill the world with evil?

IS THERE any other, more credible theory that can explain the conduct of a man who will teach vice or peddle dope to children? Evil for evil's sake is the opposite—the underside of good for good's sake. If we admit for the moment, as the East has never doubted, that there are men in the world who have evolved above our plane of morals, it follows logically that there may be others who have fallen far beneath it. They may be vastly more intelligent than we are. Satan, in the Christian scheme, has always been conceded to have brains and the word "devil" is almost a synonym for malignant cleverness.

And—here the Eastern theory again—since good and evil are exactly opposites, the followers of either will proceed to opposite extremes. It is asserted, and so definitely that there is no room left for doubt as to the theory at all events, that those who grope their way toward the higher planes of good, refuse to accept power over those who follow them; although they insist on obedience from those whom they consent to teach, they insist on its being freely given, in order that the individual may himself accept the full responsibility for every step he takes, without which—if the theory is true—there is no character improvement. In other words, the aim of those who try to inculcate a higher standard of morality and knowledge is to oblige the individual to make his own decisions and to put in practise, of his own free will, what he has learned.

THE dugpas, who are said to be the students of the law of evil, use the opposite procedure. Their intention is to get, and then to keep control of, all who come within their clutches. They proceed by hypnotism and by suggestion, by force, threat, violence and by appeals to all the baser instincts, to achieve power over their victims. The simplest illustration of that theory is the drug-peddler, who supplies free dope to children in order to inculcate the habit, in order that he may have control over them and teach them to commit crimes. As an illustration it is crude, but it will serve to indicate the outline of the theory.

We naturally view all theories with suspicion that suggest the possibility of happiness in any circumstances widely different from those to which we are accustomed. I will cite an instance. It is difficult for me to imagine being happy playing golf; and I know several golfers who regard me with a pity mingled with contempt because I haven't lost my heart to their alluring game. It is not difficult to think that Shakespeare might be nervous in the New York Subway, or that Coolidge could be discontented at the court of Queen Elizabeth. In the same way it is possible to guess that individuals, whose characters have raised them from the rut of our accepted and, to us, contenting habits may prefer to live in places inaccessible to those of us who still like subways and the curious developments of modern life. (Consider Thoreau and his hut by Walden Pond.)

IT IS notorious that all philosophers and thorough-going scientists, the greater number of musicians, nearly all the poets, painters of account and leaders of the world's thought, draw themselves aloof from crowds as far as possible; and not from dislike of the crowd or from conceit, but at the bidding of experience, which proves the stark impossibility of breaking new ground without making the attempt in solitude. However excellent the company of bums might be, O. Henry used to have to go away alone to write about them. A musician, though, like Strauss, he may compose a masterpiece around the theme of washing dishes, would be driven mad if he should try to do it in the kitchen.

It is a matter of historic record that the leaders of the world's thought, who have been born from time to time and by their teaching or example have advanced the standards of the human race, have been, if not recluses, at least lonely men, preferring solitude to the exciting clamor of the crowd and normal only in the company of their selected friends. It is imaginable, then, that if there are such people in the world, as all the East believes, they would be as miserable in our midst as we might be among the company of pigs (remember: there are humans who habitually live with pigs); and that the pleasures we enjoy might be a maddening pandemonium to them. There is nothing inherently illogical in the report, that will not die, that such men as they are said to be have chosen Tibet for a home because of its seclusion.

I am asserting nothing. I am merely telling for your entertainment what the East (about a thousand million people) steadfastly believes.

AND now another phase of it, to which I have referred in "OM." There is a book by H. G. Wells—called "The Food of the Gods," if I remember rightly—in which he followed to its ultimate conclusion the discovery by scientists of food that multiplied the stature and vitality of humans. Trouble began when the chickens and rats obtained access to it through the carelessness of a custodian. Chickens grew as big as ostriches and, having no morality, slew children. Rats, increased to the size of Bengal tigers, made war on humanity. A force, in other words, had been released that was available to murderers as well as to well-wishers of humanity. The fool might use it just as easily as he who had discovered it.

Suppose then for the moment, that there are such individuals as the East believes, to whom most nature forces are an open book and who can consequently live and move and have their being without need of the encumbrances that we consider necessary. Give them, for the moment, in imagination, any scientific powers that yourself might wish to have. Then, granting that their all-compelling motive is the welfare of the human race, consider whether they should dare to let their knowledge loose, or not to keep it strictly secret, lest humanity destroy itself.

TO SAY nothing of dugpas, if there are such folk, imagine, if you will, capacity to read thought given to a criminal. Imagine the ability to set free the explosive force of atoms added to the ingenuity of modern military engineers. How many honest men would dare to learn the secret of thought-transference, lest they abuse it? How few criminals would overlook the opportunity.

That Eastern theory, if I have understood it rightly, stresses the necessity of character upbuilding as preliminary to the building up of knowledge. That is the same as the ancient mystery-teaching, which insisted on the rigorous examination of the morals of the applicant before he was accepted for initiation. Freemasonry today insists on the same precaution. Whereas, though doctors, it is true, have moral standards and the lawyers have an oath they are required to take before they practise, there is absolutely no condition to prevent a writer from debauching public morals, if he has sufficient brains, or to prevent a scientist from devoting his whole life to the invention of abominable agencies.

AND now, one other point and I am through. We like to think that we are civilized; and in some respects undoubtedly we have the right to say we are. However, if we read the morning paper it is evident that crime is on the increase, insanity not nearly on the wane, and there is no peace in the offing. Civilization does include reduction of the crime statistics, raising of the standards of art and knowledge, and increasing satisfaction with the government in consequence of the integrity and zeal of its officials. It is evident that we have much to learn.

The surest sign of an awakening is willingness to learn—to read, mark, study and digest. There was no renaissance, of which we have a record, when the men who lent it force and gave it impetus were not enthusiastic with the spirit of inquiry—eager to investigate, alert to recognize or to reject, and sure of nothing but their own ability to master the conundrums that they set themselves to solve.

There has been no civilization, since the day when China sent her envoy across the Himalayas to inquire into Buddhism, down to this one, that has amounted to anything or has endured, unless men were inquirers first and last.

The first sign of decay is an unwillingness to learn and a belief that what is is the apex of attainment. The second sign is a bewilderment of things and a belief that comfort is the end-all of existence. But the last sign is the easiest to read: it is acceptance of the shell in which the spirit hides itself and bitterness against whoever dares to try to penetrate that shell into the wonderland within. Schools, philosophies, religions, creeds, sciences, arts, nations and civilizations—all have gone down by that route. When man or nation takes the attitude that "what I think I know is good enough for me," then it is time to sound the requiem and look for who shall next appear on the horizon.—TALBOT MUNDY.

* * *

MOST of us understand perfectly that Camp-Fire is a forum for the expression of opinion on any subject within our field by any of us so far as space permits. But every once in a while some one runs amuck over some opinion expressed by somebody, considers it the opinion of the magazine itself and consequently jumps all over me, often as not for an opinion I do not hold at all.

Every so often it's good policy to explain again that opinions published in "Camp-Fire" are not the magazine's opinions unless stated as such. It might be well to go further into detail and explain that we are always open to both sides of a question. When one side is stated, the way to get the other side stated is to publish the first. There can be no system in handling these discussions. With much more material than our space can hold, and with hundreds of matters coming up all the time, the best we can do is to start a subject and print the second instalment when we get it and when we can. But I at least try quite sincerely sooner or later to give the other side of every discussion a hearing.

I confess I don't know what I'd do if some one asked me to print the other side of the anti-weapon question, nor do I know what you'd do to me if I did print it.

Well, one of you took issue with John Webb because one of his stories featured bad food for our soldiers during the war. Mr. Webb and one or two others were heard in reply. And now here is another comrade who says it was good:

New York City.

In reading the Camp-Fire section of the December 30th issue, I notice that there is a further discussion as to the quality and quantity of the food served to American soldiers overseas during the war.

I have never before felt that it was my turn to rise up from my place in the shadows on the outskirts of the Camp-Fire circle, but the subject under discussion this time is one in which I am vitally interested. It happens that I was a *private* in the 42nd (Rainbow) Division and thus anything I may say will, I am sure, not be construed as an official alibi.

IF I had been stationed at the port which Captain Webb visited, and had had the chance, I am sure that I would have accepted his invitation to come aboard and eat. And I would probably have eaten just as voraciously as any of those lucky ones who did have the chance. It is also probable that I would have told the Captain how bad, and how scarce, the food was, just as those others did. However, that would have proved nothing, because if there was anything which every member of the A. E. F. had in abundance, it was an insatiable appetite.

While I was in France I spent three months in training areas, nine months at the front (almost continuously) and, after the war was over, four months in Germany as a member of the Army of Occupation. During all this year and a half the only times that we failed to get three square meals a day was when either battle, or weather, conditions prevented food from reaching us. I forgot to state that I also spent a month away from the front in September and October of 1918, part of the time in Base Hospital 43 at Blois, France, and the rest of the month at the replacement camp in Le Mans and on trains going to and from the front. The food in the S. O. S. was of a better quality and more plentiful than that at the front so the statement of your correspondent in the issue quoted cannot be true.

THERE were times at the front when for two or three days at a stretch we received no food at all from the echelon, but neither could we communicate with them except by sending runners through when it was absolutely necessary. On the march into Germany the problem of food was again a serious one, and for two whole weeks we had for breakfast every day four hardtacks, a spoonful of fried corn-beef and a cup of very weak coffee with no sugar. For lunch we had nothing, and for supper, after a thirty or thirty-five kilometer hike we had four more hardtacks, a spoonful of boiled beans and some more of the alleged coffee.

This march into Germany again presented a serious transportation problem, and I do not see how any person, or persons, could be blamed for the slim rations which we received.

MY OUTFIT arrived in France the thirteenth of November, 1917, and at that time there were not over 250,000 American soldiers in France. The supply problem was accordingly not so great, and for Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and George Washington's Birthday we had the regulation dinner of turkey et cetera. Of course in 1918, when there were more than two million men overseas, the issuance of this regulation holiday ration was impossible.

And the final proof positive of my statements is that every man of normal health gained weight while in the service! When I was discharged in 1919 I weighed one hundred fifty-two pounds, and now, being able to choose my own food and eat as much as I please, I weigh only one hundred thirty pounds. Of course I don't know whether this is applicable to the entire A. E. F. or not, but I do know that it is true of every one to whom I have spoken on the subject.

I'll admit that the battle cry of the American Army in France was, "When Do We Eat?" but, as I said before, our appetites were abnormal, and the ration which we got must have been pretty good for us or we would never have thrived on it as we did.

I SUPPOSE that when you read this epistle you will exclaim to yourself, "Here's a bird that's written a lot but hasn't said a —— thing." I agree with you, but I had all this on my chest and had to get it off.

The big idea that I want to put across is that we mustn't let the memory of the awful craving which we felt for food all the time we were in France run away with our reason and make us forget the exceptionally good health we enjoyed, the ability we acquired on those rations to stand all sorts of exposure and to fight off the nerve-destroying forces of battle. And I am sure that any fair minded man will remember the wonderful trim he was in when discharged.—W. B. HOUSTON, Former Private 1st Class, Company "A", 151st Machine Gun Battalion.

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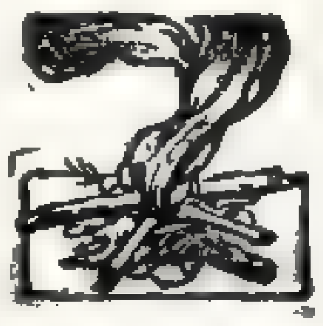

YES, adventure can be achieved with the brain as well as with the hand. Or with the pen. Decidedly I had an adventure when I arose at Camp-Fire and bet that at some time in the future even the materialists would look back and decide that our attempt to collect the debts owed to us by foreign nations was a mistake from even the materialistic point of view. At a recent Camp-Fire I expressed surprize that so few had assailed me for these remarks. I spoke too soon. Apparently they had to delay until they could catch their breaths again. Anyhow, since then letters have been raining upon me.

I knew I was taking on a large adventure when I first broached this idea—knew I was simply inviting 99% of all hearers to rise and beat me to a pulp for daring to voice such heresy, such sacrilege against our twin holies, the Almighty Dollar and the Creed of Greed. I'm afraid it only made me all the more willing to take a chance and see what happened.

Most of the letters were flattering. Their general import might be expressed by "My ——! Have you gone crazy?" Which of course, implies that they had once considered me sane, whereas I had judged that they would consider me crazy from birth. They even considered me still sufficiently sane to be worth reasoning with.

But what I wanted was just an adventure, not an argument. Just wanted to stir things up and make a bet. Knew very well I couldn't prove my point with words, but was—and am—so sure I was right that I wanted to bet on it.

Some day maybe I'll be warranted in explaining my theory as to argument. I'll say now merely that I don't believe any subject of size and complexity can ever be satisfactorily settled by argument as to its intrinsic merits and demerits. Real progress can be made only by determining upon a basic principle and deciding all specific questions, not according to their own points, but solely by the gage of that basic principle, which is more important than any case that can arise under it.

Some specific case arises. Two sides to it. Both sides can be supported by millions of arguments. The human brain flatters itself it can solve the question, no matter how complex and vast the subject may be. It fails to note that the human brain is producing at least two contradictory answers—or, rather, it dismisses this fact by the simple method of stating that "The other fellow is wrong." It fails to see that what has been tested is not the question itself but the ability of the two sides to argue it and the ability of the judges to absorb and weigh the arguments that happen to be offered.

In other words, the human brain has a bad case of swelled head. It thinks it can isolate a specific question from the complexity and vastness of the universe, from whatever laws and principles rule the universe, look over the question itself and give the right answer from its narrow glimpse of the infinite complexities involved. The human brain thinks it is God. It is only a —— fool.

This matter of foreign debts. I know myself incapable of solving it by arguments based on its intrinsic values and on such small fraction of the universe's complexities as is covered by national debts, politics, high finance, armies, and so forth. I know that you, too, however wise you may deem yourself, are incapable of solving it by such means. Either your answer or mine, if worked out by such methods, is folly.

Such questions, however large they may be, can be solved correctly only by referring them to a basic principle vastly larger, far more enduring and infinitely more important than all such questions put together. If you want the right answer, test by that principle and abide by the result, despite what cries of "Ruin!" and "Folly!" may arise from those who, with so little ground, consider themselves competent to judge the endless intricacies of the universe of which the case is so small a part.

I am sufficiently a Christian to believe in brotherhood and in the Golden Rule as basic principles. Not as things for Sunday mention only, but as a basic principle for individual and community living all through the week.

Do you believe in those principles? If not, you brand yourself not only not a Christian but an advocate of strife, an enemy of society.

If you do believe in it and practise it, you must make it the test in every concrete instance that arises. And you can not let yourself be shaken by whatever host of intrinsic arguments are raised against you.

If you do that, you must agree that in this case of foreign debts the only right answer is some manner of forgiveness of our debtors, some kind of giving instead of taking, some kind of befriending instead of bleeding.

It may seem to you an insane answer, a folly beyond words to express. *It seems just that to me—when I look at the problem as a thing in itself.*

But when we look at any case that way we are lost. Ask a lawyer what happens if he looks at a case and judges its intricacies without reference to the basic principles that decide all cases. Ask doctor, preacher, scientist, artist what chaos and folly arise if he fails to judge an individual case from basic principles.

I ask you, comrades, am I not adventuring in daring to advance such ideas in this day and age? Many of you who fear nothing else fear ridicule. Could I call down more ridicule upon myself than by flaunting such ideas in the face of the materialism that rules us? Most of you like comrades or allies when you go up against hopeless odds. I have none. Many of you have called me fool. No single one of you has stood to my side. Not one single Christian minister or priest has had the courage or the faith to say "Here is a fellow trying to apply the essence of our religion to real life. It's part of my job to throw in with any such attempt, all the more when the attempt is made in public." I don't ask any help or any allies and as for ridicule it may howl itself red in the face and be —— to it, but I ask you, comrades, isn't it an adventure?

I have thought there was no need to state what I thought would make you decide at some future time that collecting these debts hadn't paid us. But apparently no one has even thought of it. Well, then, this is it:

Those debts are entirely just debts by all standards of our work-a-day world and I have only contempt for those foreign nations who are trying to squirm out of them, knowing that they are just debts by their own standards. A contempt tempered by pity for the dire necessity they let drive them to contemptible action. An honest admission of just obligation along with a frank plea for friendly mercy would have made a different case.

But, however wrong they may be, the cold fact remains that because of those debts they hate us. Also the cold fact that they realize (and hate us accordingly) that payment of those debts will make them our financial victims for many years to come—a situation we can be counted on, from past performance, to use for all there is in it. Those debts, added to other drains resulting from the war, constitute a financial and economic pressure that is tremendous, almost unbearable. Your materialistic principle is that all wars are caused by economic pressure, and most of you materialists hold equally that any powerful economic pressure will cause war.

Are you, then, so dull as to believe this almost unbearable pressure will not sooner or later drive them to war against us? An economic war first and then a military war.

And are you so insulated an American that you believe any American, any time, in any circumstances, can lick two, five or ten of any other nation? Are you so forgetful that you've forgotten it took us a year after our entry into the war to prepare ourselves to take any real part in it? Are you so blind you've failed to note our politicians have let us slump again into just such unpreparedness?

We have joined Europe's world peace movement on the extremely ridiculous basis that we shall take part in it provided we at no time take part in it. That avenue toward peace seems closed, and that array of nations arrayed against us. For the rest, Europe hates us. And, what is worse, fears us. Unfortunately it fears our economic power in peace far more than our military power in war. From Europe's point of view we are more vulnerable in war than in peace. War is her logical way out. She will follow it.

We are a great nation, very rich. They are poor—now. Their prospects for some years ahead are poor. We are in no immediate danger. But ask economists whether they are so poor they won't be able to wage war in five, ten or twenty years. And ask them and the military authorities whether, if our present unpreparedness continues—or even if it doesn't—we shall lose from an armed attack upon us by a group of European nations more than the amount of the debts we are collecting, the debts whose forgiveness would have created friendlier feeling and removed the severity of Europe's economic pressure.

Incidentally, just what leads you to believe we are going to succeed in collecting these debts? Just optimism?

But remember that what I brought to you was not an argument but a wager. I repeat it. Five, ten, twenty years from now look back and decide for yourselves whether we'd not have gained more, even by purely materialistic standards, through forgiveness of these debts than through trying to collect them.

Place your bets, gentlemen, place your bets. Play is made.—A. S. H.

* * *

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2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apartment 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

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6. Islands Part 3 Cuba
WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Warner Sugar Co. of Cuba, Miranda, Oriente, Cuba. Geography, industries, people, customs, hunting, fishing, history and government.

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C. R. Mahaffey, Box 304, San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

42. Mexico Part 3 Southeastern
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S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Send International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

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52. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, 5647 Lexington Ave., Hollywood, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

53. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

54. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

55. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance; oil-fields; hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

56. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Frank Earnest, Sugar Loaf, Colo. Agriculture, stock-raising, mining, game, fur-hunting, fishing, camping, outdoor life in general.

57. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
Fred W. Egleston, Bozeman, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

58. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and inhabitants.

59. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

60. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson, care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

61. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber.

62. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

63. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See section 65.*)

64. Middle Western U. S, Part 5 Great Lakes
H. C. Gardner, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio. Seamanship, navigation, courses and distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties; river navigation.

65. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Adirondacks, New York; Lower Miss. (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms, North and East Shores of Lake Mich.
Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Transcontinental and other auto-trail tours (Lincoln, National, Old Santa Fé, Yellowstone, Red Ball, Old Spanish Trail, Dixie Highway, Ocean to Ocean, Pike's Peak); regional conditions, outfits, suggestions; skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake tripping and cruising; trapping; fresh water and button shelling; wildcraft, camping, nature study.

66. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
(Editor to be appointed.)

67. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
(Editor to be appointed.)

68. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, care of *Adventure*. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

69. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, care of *Adventure*. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

70. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot River. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine
H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

72. Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.
Howard R. Voight, 108 Hobart St., New Haven, Conn. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions, history.

73. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey
(Editor to be appointed.)

74. Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland
Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J, Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, care of *Adventure*.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. (Editor to be appointed.)

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2040 Newark St.; N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data;

schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Capt. Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

Lieut. Francis Greene, U. S. N. R., 241 Eleventh Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. International and constitutional law concerning naval and maritime affairs.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, Museum of American Indians, 155th St. and Broadway, N. Y. C. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. **Medical** and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazard, the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. **How to** get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

P.—Entomology

Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write Laurence Jordan, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com. Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo and Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **State Police of any State,** Francis H. Bent, Jr., care of *Adventure*.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National Parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men,** Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. C.

Dogs

TRAINING for field-trials.

Request:—"I am very much interested in field-trials and want to know something about them. I wanted to come to the Gulf States field-trials last December and see them and also meet you and talk with you but could not get away from my work.

The following is a rather long list of questions but I will make them as specific as possible:

1. What dogs are eligible for entrance to field-trials? Do they have to be registered dogs?

2. I have a dog registered with *The American Field*. I have been told that there is another registry and that my dog would only be eligible to enter field-trials sanctioned by *The American Field* unless he was registered with the other registry. Is this so?

3. What are considered the premier field-trials in the United States? I always thought those held at Grand Junction, Tenn., every year were considered the highest but have been told that the National Field-Trials held at Union Springs, Ala., were the highest.

4. My dog is an English setter sired by Mr. Eugene M. out of Tiny Lady Teasdale who is a granddaughter of Ch. Candy Kid. My dog is only six months old but is a very large dog. He is twenty-six inches high and weighs forty-one pounds. I have had him out several times and he is very birdy and has a good nose. He is very fast and a wide ranger. Several professional trainers have written me to let them train and handle him and shape him for entry in some field-trials next winter but I prefer to train him myself. I am a lover of quail-shooting and have trained my own dogs from the time I started hunting but have never owned a registered dog before. I can train dogs for good shooting dogs but am not sure I can train them for field-trials. Do you think I can train him or would you advise my placing him with some good trainer?

5. I believe you are the author of a book on handling and training bird-dogs. Where can same be purchased and how much?

6. Can you suggest any other good books on training dogs for field-trials?

7. Are there any set of commands to be used in handling a dog at field-trials? I talk to my dog while he is going down on game to steady him.

8. Are dogs handled by whistle or vocal commands?

9. How are dogs rated or judged in field-trials? Does the pose of the dog while on point count?

I believe this about covers everything I can think of about field-trials."—G. W. CAMERON, Monroeville, Ala.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—Your dog is eligible to all open field-trials and all amateur field-trials if you handle it yourself in them, even though it is trained by a pro. *The American Field* only conducts one regular field-trial and that is the American Field Futurity. The National Championship field-trial makes all entries eligible that have won before in any of the regular conducted field-trials.

As a rule it is very hard to develop a dog properly for a field-trial which has had any or much shooting done over it, as most hunters are bound to have their dogs backcast sooner or later and this is regarded as a serious fault. Also it is best you work your dog entirely from horseback as all are handled in that manner at trials, and also it makes the range of the dog greater. Your dog must show range, bird work, bird sense and great speed to be a prospect.

It would be advisable for you to start in one of the amateur field-trials first, such as I recently judged at Bay Minnette, Ala., the Gulf Coast Trials. *The American Field* each year publishes a list of coming events in each of their issues as fast as they are announced.

Harry Newell at Union Springs, Ala., would be a mighty good man to handle your dog. He would let you know right away if it is a prospect worth training for trials. Your dog has excellent blood lines.

I have one book "Quail and the Quail Dog." Shelly publishes a book "Twentieth Century Breaking," which will be of help. It can be procured from *Field and Stream*, New York.

Try to meet your head deputy game warden, Ted Cottrell, of Birmingham. Buttonhole him and make him talk field-trials. He judged with me and is a good authority. If I can be of further help, let me know.

The full statement of the departments, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Georgian Bay

MINK, marten, muskrat, beaver.

Request:—"Another fellow and myself intend a little trip into the country bordering Georgian Bay in the vicinity of Blind River, if you know the place, and are interested in the habits of the people, insects, animals, and fish therein. We are not bothered by transportation difficulties as we go direct to B. R. on a lumber carrier and will probably make a lumber camp (MacFaddan—old Eddy holdings) our base for the trip. We contemplate the trip in July, as I have to go to work in August, so must ask you whether the flies are active then or not and any other pests that you think of. Following is a list of assorted questions for our edification:

1. Where do we obtain hunting or fishing licenses before going or can these be obtained there?
2. What game is in season, if any?
3. Are rifles allowed out of season? (We don't carry high-power.)
4. Is the heavy leather, genuine moccasin adaptable to that country—if not what is best for footwear?
5. Specify suitable socks in either case above.
6. Are Indian guides obtainable? What fee?
7. Where can we get maps of that section?
8. What sort of weather are we liable to strike?
9. Of what sort is the country back from the Bay? What inhabitants occupy it—man and animal? Lakes, rivers, hills, timber or what?

The above questions will give you an idea of what we desire in the way of information so don't fear our wrath if you have anything else of interest to add. I might give you a brief summary of our plans. I have wanted to go into that country for years and this is my last opportunity for a long time to come, so hope to make it or bust. I have had some experience at camping, as has my partner, but not like some of you. We want to go up there and go out for a week's trip with a guide to get the hang of the country and pointers from him. After that we just want to start out inland, prepared for two or three weeks, either in canoe or by foot, and simply enjoy ourselves to the utmost. We'll be lost the first day out but what's the difference for, after we have gone as far as we wish, the only thing left is to head toward the shore and railroad. By-the-by, how far north from the Bay is the C. P. R. R.? Do you disagree with the plan? If so, why?"—E. C. EDDY, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Reply, by A. D. L. Robinson:—I will admit that you have given me quite a contract by the questions in your letter. Nevertheless it is a pleasure to answer questions which *Adventure* readers ask, particularly when they are as concise as yours. Your proposed destination up on Blind River is a little out of my district, I think, being on the North Channel of Lake Huron, but near enough to mine for me to answer and so save you the trouble of applying to other sources:

Now your questions in order:

1. I should advise you to obtain your hunting and fishing licenses from the Minister of Mines, House of Assembly, Toronto, Ontario, so that you may save time. You could get them at Sudbury, I am sure, though the places where one may get them are not specified in any books on game-laws that I have. It might be well at the same time to ask him for a copy of the "Ontario Game and Fisheries Laws 1925" which tell you all about what you may or may not do.

2. Deer are not in season then, nor can one kill a cow moose or calf AT ANY TIME. Small game have their different seasons, all of which this little book sets forth and which would take me a long time to quote. The license to hunt for each person is forty dollars, license fee (for issuing) one dollar. That refers to non-residents of Ontario. But, at the time when you wish to go up there, no animals such as beaver, otter, muskrat, fisher, mink, or raccoon may be killed. The season for the first mentioned three is in the early spring; for the last named, in the late fall. Therefore, it would appear to me to be a waste of money to apply for and buy a license for hunting at that time of the year. Fishing is another thing for which the license is more reasonable.

3. From the Game-Laws of Ontario it would appear that firearms are allowed out of season. But

no person employed in a lumber camp or by a railroad, save under special license, may carry a firearm. But no "automatic" is allowed. And one may not carry a gun in an automobile when loaded.

4. Is the heavy leather moccasin adaptable to that country? I should advise against it. I have not been that far up, but the region all around Georgian Bay would be traveled best by rubber-soled boots or shoes—or even "running shoes." If you get into swamp, moccasins are not serviceable. Rubber boots might be a good thing to carry along; otherwise I recommend plain, heavy calfskin leather boots with rubber soles.

5. Suitable socks? Have two or three pairs of woolen ones with you, but either silk-wool or plain lisle or cotton would be all right for summer wear. It is often very hot in that region in July.

6. Indian guides? Now you have me! I don't know of any place in Canada where such may be had by asking for them. There is no guide department, but at places like Sudbury, or even in the Blind River district I fancy one could get such a guide. There are Indians and half-breeds in that part of the country, and I think they should be easy enough to get. An Indian guide from any other place than that district would know no more about it than you would. At all those little stations along the C. P. R. R. one should be able to see Indians who might be willing to act as guides. For fees—well, they vary. But you may be sure of one thing: a guide, whether Indian or breed, will charge you enough! Not less than three dollars a day anyway. Maybe more. More likely as much as you will pay him. In Algonquian Park three dollars is the regular fee. Per day, of course.

7. You can get maps of that section by applying to the Department of the Interior, House of Assembly, Toronto, Ontario. I fancy they would want the usual ten cents for the map.

8. Weather? All kinds! Perhaps no snowstorms, but rain, cold and extreme heat are quite usual. Be prepared for anything!

9. The country back from the bay is pretty much that of a timber-devastated one. It was once the scene of great lumbering activities. Of course, there will be lots of third-growth left. But it is wild. Just before you come to Blind River is Lake Luzon and north of that lake is a series of lakes, terminating in a large one, Lake Chiblow. You should be able to have a pretty free watercourse with few portages. There will be little rivers of which the average map takes no notice, which is always the case where there are many lakes. For animals, the kind indigenous to that kind of country—mink, marten, muskrat, beaver, etc. But, if you go in July, that is a closed season for all those small animals—or for any other kind but bears and wolves for which there is no closed season. The people—what there are—will be pretty much French-Canadians or white people who are trying to farm. But it will be sparsely settled. All those northern places are.

The C. P. R. R. is quite near the shore—not more than ten or fifteen miles, I think. If you went by steamer from Sarnia you would have to go to the "Soo" and from there back to Blind River station. But if by railroad, then from Sudbury on to that place.

I think your plan a good one. The very kind for red-blooded, adventurous men like you two. None of us get enough out of the beaten paths. As long as you have a compass and understand it, you won't get lost. And there's always the sun! Traveling by canoe, of course, would insure you a better supply of provisions than by packing them. I don't think you would want for fish—pike, lunge, bass and pickerel. I think, too, that the mosquitoes would be your only pest at that time, and if not camping in a swamp, those may be managed. I have not been up in that section in July, but up on the Mattagami, south of James Bay and near Timmins, the flies in July are bad. Those are harder to fight than are mosquitoes. For flies don't fear smoke. They are after your blood and manage to get it before you know they have prospected you. They get "under your skin" all right. By the way, you should be able to get huckleberries up there about the end of July or even wild strawberries.

Come again, if you think I can be of any use to you.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

New Mexico

WHERE the beginning of reclamation work promises plenty of truck gardening.

Request:—"Would it be a practical idea for a man single, age thirty-five; weight one hundred and sixty-five pounds; in good health, to come out to New Mexico with five hundred dollars in May or June; get outside work on some sort of farm by the month; the idea being to locate a few acres to use as a truck or chicken farm after familiarizing oneself with local conditions, etc.?

Could a fellow do this with a chance of making a living in a modest way with possibilities of working into a fair living?

Primarily the idea is outdoor life and work. Perhaps Colorado would offer some such a proposition although that is not in your territory. If possible would like to be away from winters, such as we have here in Ohio. I thought if I came out with five hundred dollars cash and could work a season for some one getting all the "dope" I could thereby, and incidentally adding two or three hundred more to above amount, that there might be a chance to "break in" somehow. Have had experience on small "truck" farms in Ohio and New York States.

Since the war, my work has been in a watch factory—very sedentary. Have never been satisfied, but owing to circumstances have forced myself to stay at it. Now, however, I feel free to follow the inclination I've always had to get back to the soil—where I believe I "fit in" rather than routine city life.

Be frank in telling me what you think about it. I'll appreciate any suggestions you can make, I assure you, also."—LEROY L. LOEFFLER, Lakewood, Ohio.

Reply, by H. D. Robinson:—Yes, I think your proposition of coming out to New Mexico in the spring with five hundred dollars, getting into agriculture somewhere as laborer, and finally work into a piece of land, would work out.

In and around Albuquerque there are a large number of truck gardens, and with the reclamation of the valley, which is just commencing, there will be lots of chance for truck gardening, chicken raising, etc. The chances for this also exist in the lower Rio Grande Valley around Las Cruces and even below El Paso under the Elephant Butte reclamation project. Also in the Pecos Valley around Roswell, Artesia and Carlsbad.

There are wonderful chances in the Salt River Valley in southern Arizona and you might investigate there. Would suggest that you write the Chamber of Commerce at the following places: Albuquerque, Roswell, Las Cruces, all in New Mexico, and Phœnix, Mesa and Chandler, in Arizona.

If you will send your name to "The Earth" care Santa Fé Railway at Topeka, Kansas, they will send you their monthly publication of that name, free of charge for six months, which is devoted to the agriculture of what they call "The Santa Fé Southwest" which is all of this southwest country reached by the Santa Fé system. From this you can get a lot of good dope on agricultural possibilities in the southwest.

With the above "dope" you could then decide on the particular section you would like to try out.

I have just called up the Chamber of Commerce here and they will mail you some stuff today.

Will be glad to give you additional information if, after you look further, you want more specific information on this section and will ask some questions.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address JOSEPH COX, *Adventure*, New York.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ANDERSEN, DAN. Would like to hear from you. Last seen in Salt Lake City, Utah, in August, 1918. Billy would also like to hear from you. Please write your brother, A. E. ANDERSEN, 3202 McDougal, Everett, Washington.

CARR, ROBERT R. Formerly of Coast Guard 165, Staten Island—"Letters sent you confiscated by other party—come to defense—need you badly."—B. DOHERTY, 372 Convent Avenue, New York City.

SEAMESTER. Wish to hear from relatives and descendants having a D. A. R. record—and from descendants of John Seamester who came from England and Scotland to America and who participated in the American Revolutionary War.—DOROTHY SEAMESTER, 414 N. West Street, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

OLSEN, EDWIN LOUIS. About twenty-eight years of age; formerly a member of Co. B, Colorado National Guard; later fireman in U. S. Navy. Was in Didsbury, Alberta, Canada, in May, 1921. A friend would like to know where he is.—Care of *Adventure*.

ECKLEY, THOMAS F. Who attended Adams School in Quincy, Illinois about 1891 or 1892. If this reaches your eye, please write at once to one of the old "trio" who would like to locate you. Write to ALFRED S. RYNIKER, 444 West Garfield Avenue, Decatur, Illinois.

BARNETT, JACK. Formerly of Brand 'Framers New Laid Egg' Company, Montreal. Communicate with M. M. CAMPBELL, Post Office Box 385, Montreal, Quebec.

McCAFFERY. Would like to get in touch with McCafferys anywhere in the U. S. A. My grandfather, born at Scots House, County Monaghan, Ireland, had six brothers and no sisters. One brother is believed to have emigrated about fifty years ago and settled in Boston, Mass. I would appreciate any information.—BRIAN J. McCAFFERY, Alphonsus House, O'Connell Avenue, Limerick, Irish Free State.

THOMAS, JOSID S. A native of Georgia. Last known address, Birmingham, Alabama. Your friend would like to get in touch with you.—A. S. KILLINGSWORTH, 802 East Vernon Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

SPIEGAL, DAVID. Formerly of Boston, Mass., last known address, Los Angeles, Calif. Your friend would like to get in touch with you.—A. S. KILLINGSWORTH 802 East Vernon Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

OSBERNE, HELEN. Left Omaha, Neb. October, 1925, dark hair, has half-moon scar on chin. Height five feet six inches. Any information will be appreciated by her mother.—MRS. J. JANOTA, 1718 Dodge Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

HACKENSCHMIDT, KID. Would like to hear from you. Last heard of in 1919. Connected with some athletic or stadium show, touring the U. S. Anxious to hear from my friend.—C. C. WHITE, Hazlehurst, Mississippi.

STRUBBE, CAPTAIN G. A. Formerly of Montreal. Please get in touch with M. M. CAMPBELL, P. O. Box 385, Montreal, Quebec.

"TROOP I, 4TH CAV." Would like to hear from any of the old bunch who were in Jolo with me in 1906-7. Would also be glad to hear from any one who has been stationed at this post in recent years.—Address "BIDDY", Box 323, Perth, Ontario, Canada.

KERNEY, MARSHAL. Last heard of about forty-five years ago from Butte City, Montana. Would like to know if he is still living or has any family. Lived in Philadelphia before he went West. Any information as to his whereabouts would be appreciated by JOSEPH G. KERNEY, 419 Third Avenue, Haddon Heights, New Jersey.

ANY EX-MEMBERS of the 13th Battalion Canadian Railway Troops No. 3 Co. in France, who would know and care to help *by testimony only*, a brother Ex-Member in a case of a Pension Appeal."—ROBERT WRIGHT, Care of *Adventure*.

OLSEN, EDWARD. Last heard from October, 1899, age then about thirty. Any information regarding him would be appreciated by OLIVER OLSEN, 3351 Baychester Avenue, New York City.

BUNTON, MARY JANE. Married Ira Teller of Lyons, N. Y. My mother who was their daughter, died January 14, 1926 at Davenport, Iowa. Any information will be appreciated by MRS. MAUDE OLMSTEAD, Broadalbin, New York.

BAILEY, DR. WILLIAM CURTISS, M. D. Last known address in New York City about 1907, prior to that time owned and operated a Sanaitarium in Los Vegas, New Mexico, U. S. A. Any information regarding him will be appreciated by his sister, IDA L. VAN ALLEN or his nephew, HAROLD L. VAN ALLEN, 8419 So. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

ATTENTION PARDNERS! Would like to hear from any Battery D men 2nd F. A. January, 1912 to 1915 at Vancouver, Wash. or Stotsenberg, P. J.; Serg. T. Hastey, Paul Korns, H. Pullman, Guy Eggelston, Carl Moschell, in fact any boys who remember me.—H. J. RATTERMAN, Battalion Musican, 1019 Baxter Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky.

RAMSAY, MARCUS. You are dreadfully missed; at least, let me know that you are quite well. Dad left for India. Urgent. Vastly Important. Phone Mother at the office. Need your help.—EDIE RAMSAY.

"NIECE" Mother's name (Mrs. Sallie A. Conaway). Please communicate with your uncle, have important news.—BENJAMINE F. MCCOY, Lancaster Company, Merry Point, Virginia.

THE following have been inquired for in either the April 8th or May 8th, 1926 issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

BEHRANT, HENRY; Booth, Stephen E.; Breeden, Ernest C.; Brenton, Jack W.; Bruen or Bruhn; Chapman, Walter S.; Deacon, Hoke; Denney, William B.; Dollar, James Eddie; Fitzgerald, William Patrick; Fox or Foxe, Jimmie—"Frisco Jimmie;" Friend of Spook; Greer, Frank A.; Grubbs, Earnest C.; Keener, E. Kirby; Marcus, R.; Monnet, Richard J.; Moore, Ted; Roberts, Frank; Roberts, Lewis; "Servatius" Frank Servatius; Sklepik, Vincent; Sorensen, W. N.; Wheeler, Edward; Wenger, Herbert.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JUNE 23RD ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE FORGING — ***Arthur D. Howden Smith***
The bronze blade of the Pharaoh would not cut bone.

INSTINCT — ***Bruce Johns***
The teamster's dog never quit.

RAMSDEN Part II — ***Talbot Mundy***
At the threshold of forbidden Tibet.

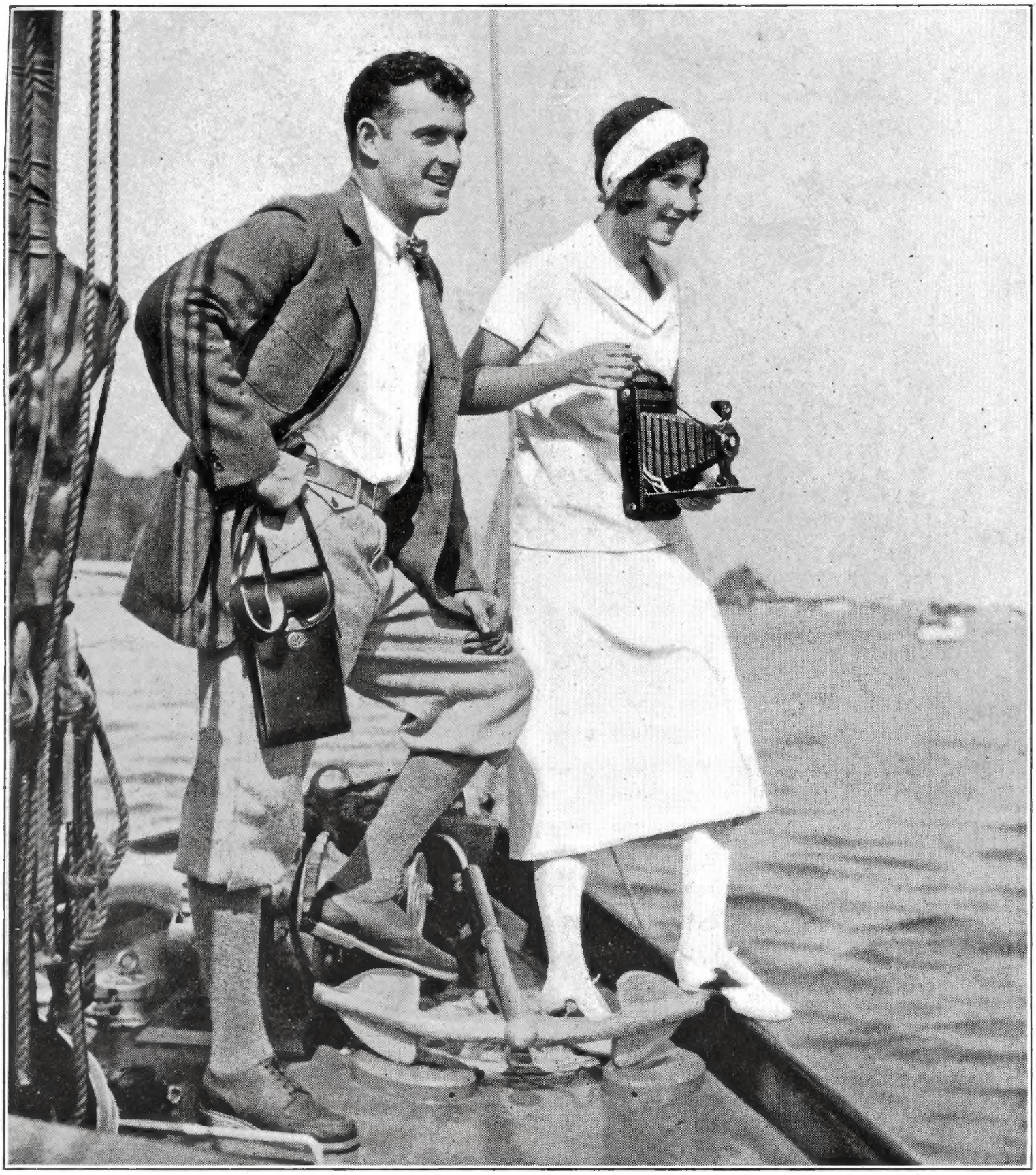
DOUBLE MATTHEW WALKER — ***F. R. Buckley***
Captain Weatherfield stowed away on a British tramp.

WHITE SQUALL A Poem — ***Helen Von Kolnitz Hyer***

SPARE WING — ***F. St. Mars***
Some people called him an eagle.

STILL FARTHER AHEAD

THE ISSUE following the next will contain *long* stories by W. C. Tuttle, Harold Lamb and Thomson Burtis; and short stories by Bill Adams, Edward Shenton, Ernest Haycox, Lewis J. Rendel and Georges Surdez; stories of cowboys on the Western range, aviators in the airlanes, Moghuls in Turkestan, hardcase skippers and bucko mates on the high seas, doughboys on the western front, swamp runners in Louisiana, French troops in North Africa, Colonial soldiers with Morgan, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.



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